

MiPOesias REVISTA LITERARIA

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Russell Interviews Kooser ~ A MiPO Interview
~Ted Kooser named new Poet Laureate~

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This PDF is a condensed version. To view the complete issue, stop by www.mipoesias.com/2005.

You used to be an insurance executive. Did your coworkers know that you wrote and what did they think?

Yes, they were aware that I was a writer, and I think most of them thought well of me for it. Most people have a dream of something they'd like to be doing other than what they are doing, and I provided a handy example of someone doing just that.

You have said one of your 10 favorite books was William Carlos Williams' "In the American Grain." Can you elaborate?

Williams prose is rich and lovely, for one thing, but he also showed some marvelous insights about American history.



Has the rise of the internet had any effect on your writing?

No, I use the internet very infrequently. However, having a computer has made prose writing much easier. I doubt if I could have finished my prose book, **Local Wonders: Seasons in the Bohemian Alps (American Lives)**, without a word processing program that enabled me to move things around. If I'd had to type it I might never have finished.

To what extent do you revise poems? Have you ever had a first draft that you left unchanged?

I revise extensively and have never written a first draft that I left as is. A short poem might go through 30 or 40 versions. I revise toward clarity and away from difficulty, wanting the poem to appear to be written with ease.

Other Poet Laureates, like Billy Collins, have used the position to publicize poetry. Do you have any plans yet for how you might use the position?

I plan to have some projects but it's much too early to be talking about them.



[Local Wonders](#)

Ted Kooser

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Russell Interviews Tost — A MiDO Mini-Interview

Do you have a particular audience in mind when you're writing?

Well, there's a lot of platitudes I could serve up to answer this—I write for me, for an ideal audience, for 'the public at large', for other poets, for future English majors—all of which assume a certain amount of self-knowledge & certitude over the writing act. Which strikes me, in my case, as inaccurate. But writing is also not a mystery; I usually know exactly what I'm doing, or what I want to do. Or, to try to use Jack Spicer's framework, I know what pieces of furniture I'm placing throughout the room for the resident aliens to rearrange into poetry.



I'm aware of audience, hazily. I'm also aware of myself as a reader, & how little patience I have for writers or artists who seem to have too many eyes on the audience (when they should have them on the prize, so to speak). Off & on I think of Bob Dylan's relationship with audience, at least in those earlier years, of his 'going electric' as his big play in the endless power struggle between the artist who wants autonomy & praise, and the audience that wants the artist to fulfill its expectations (or to exceed its expectations in ways it expects & approves). Dylan used volume & his own mastery to counter the audience (in response to taunts of "Judas" he turns to his band and sneers "Play fucking loud" right before launching into "Like a Rolling Stone"; he doesn't sneer "play fucking precise"), to force them to grant him autonomy, challenging them to praise his authority. It's an interesting stance. I wonder if a poet can do something similar. Narrative is one option, I guess, for capturing an audience & asserting one's will; perhaps creating a compelling self-myth (Plath, Pound, Frank Stanford) is another. And by self-myth I don't just mean creating an interesting biography, or of dying young and beautiful, but of tying up the work with the life in such a manner that it becomes a kind of allegory, of whatever kind. This is kind of vague to me. But doesn't what we know, or think we know, of Dickinson's life inform the poems, and vice versa? Doesn't it seem to follow in this manner with many poets: Stevens, WCW, Stein, Hughes, Spicer, Bishop? Maybe when people bemoan the fact that so many poets have entered academia, they aren't bemoaning the quality of poetry, because I think by any measure the poetry of the last 40 years has been amazing. Perhaps people are bemoaning the absence of variety in the biographies & trajectories to tie together with the work, thus the lack of myth-like figures (except for the endless parade of poets who are both Prometheus and vulture).

So far none of this has addressed a writer's own relationship as the creator (or at least the catalyst) & first reader of the work. My answer so far seems to assume a one-to-one correspondence between the work and the poet. This is all very vague and off-the-cuff, but I'm trying to present an answer that doesn't make me gag. I think for myself I work best when I don't think of audience as a general plurality, but of a single reader. But I think it's a mistake to only think of a single poem as the only possible currency in this relationship—realistically, from my own experience, any worthwhile relationships I have with a writer's work usually occur in the following units: a book, a 'phase' or period in a writer's work, or in the body of work as a whole. So I'm trying to begin conceptualizing my writing life in these terms, of approaching the above units in a fruitful manner.

When I was a kid I'd go into the woods after the snow & make tracks: first normal tracks, then I'd hop on one foot, or drag a foot, or backtrack and create small mysteries or dramas (why'd the footprints stop at the tree? why aren't there footprints away from the tree and back out of the woods? did Tony climb the tree? did a bear eat 'im?) in case anyone coming in after me was paying attention. That might be a little bit of a precious metaphor, but I think it captures, to a degree, some of my impulses.

How much do you think a poet's life influences the risk-taking in their work?

I don't think I take that many risks in my poems, & I'm unsure how much my life influences that. I don't know what "real" risks I can make. I guess I could write poems about intricate assassination plots concerning actual politicians or celebrities, or realistic narratives about molesting a bald eagle, or things like that (carried to whatever degree), and that might be risk-taking in terms of my own well-being. But I have no interest, that I know of, of writing about the above. I suppose if I found it necessary to write about the above, for whatever reason, I'd hope my considerations over whether or not to do so would be more concerned with ethical & aesthetic matters than with risk-taking ones.

Race & sex matters pop up in my writing. I don't know if it'd be risky for me to pursue these matters more extensively, to wrestle on the page certain prejudices that I believe I still carry, however far down, & that are perpetuated in the culture & language, & how we use language to brush aside or laugh at these prejudices. In my in-progress manuscript there's a returning image of a speaker 'giving head': to ideas, to words, to a donkey, to another man. Is this risky? I don't fear for my safety or future job prospects when others read these poems. Maybe if I get too offensive I'll risk being labeled a sexist or racist or pervert, but sometimes I'm not sure I'm not a sexist or racist person, despite my best intentions. I'm probably a pervert as well.

I wonder who's taking real risks in their poems in a way that threatens their livelihood and/or health (my own definition of risk)? & should one "expect" artists to always take risks? (how far do we carry the 'risk wish'? do I want my barber taking risks with every snip? & how much do I want my bartender to express himself when he mixes me a drink? etc.)

Amiri Baraka angered a lot of people, but he's not (I hope) at risk in terms of his livelihood or well-being. Experimental poets get tenure too. For whatever reason I don't want to make an automatic fetish out of risk-taking, or being underground/experimental/etc. It's a success of the last 50 years of poetry that there seems to be tangible communities available for the poet who wants to fly the New Formalist or Post-Avant or Confessional or whatever flag.

I don't think I, as a poet, have to always take risks—but I should be willing to take them if that's what it takes to do the voodoo. One can 'risk' becoming unknown, or a poetic hermit, but that assumes those states are intrinsically negative, states to risk falling into; I wonder if it's peculiarly American or modern trait to assume that one deserves and is entitled to an audience? Or if that's just a human trait. People talk about risking not being read in a hundred years, & that seems ridiculous to me, like house dogs fretting whether or not anyone's going to remember their greatest late night howls a hundred years from now.

It's a contemporary American privilege, I know, to speak of risk as flippantly as this.

I didn't really think of making *Invisible Bride* all prose as a risk—there's a long tradition of prose poetry, & models for it everywhere, from Rosmarie Waldrop & Joe Wenderoth to John Ashbery & Lyn Hejinian. That particular choice, however long it took me (it took a while to realize it), didn't arise from a sense of edginess, but instead from a sense of aesthetics: the poems simply worked better, for me, as blocks of prose.

I could say that the real risk is in writing things I can't reread or share with others or that don't live up to my aesthetic ideals—I'd be right in saying that, I think. But I'd also be right in saying that those things would also be risks worth taking.



Campbell McGrath will revise the same poem for ten years. Elizabeth Bishop left blank spots in her drafts where she could not find the perfect word and would hang these draft on her wall. Robert Lowell put his poems through hundreds of drafts, and Donald Hall reports that some of his poems go through 600 revisions. Yet, Bukowski revised little as did Ginsberg. How much does revision play a role in your method?

I had problems with one of my professors in grad school because I didn't follow the Lowell/Hall model. At the end of the semester we were supposed to turn in revised copies of poems we'd bring to workshop. I more or less brought in either unaltered copies of poems that I thought were fine as they were when I turned them in the first time, or, in place of poems that I didn't think worked, I brought in new poems.

To use a common metaphor, I didn't think some of my poems had engines in them, so I didn't see the point of polishing them. Which I still believe to a point. There's a bunch of stuff that I write that's just not worth the time. I mean, I could revise it over & over again, but these things still wouldn't be all that interesting. They're kind of dumb. For instance I thought it'd be interesting to write a quasi-offensive poem about low-riders. It's a pretty awful poem, & even if I sent copy after copy to Donald Hall or whomever, nothing's really going to change that. I could maybe tighten up some phrases & sharpen the imagery & insert striking similes & such, but the poem would still suck.

I'm working on the last piece of my next manuscript, which seems like it'll be at least 40 pages, & each day I read all I've written so far & then jump in. If a sentence (there's a model set up for this piece—one aspect is that it's made of discrete sentences) doesn't work, I'll as often erase it & start from scratch as I tinker with it. I'm trying to create an intelligence in this thing & to push with the full force of my abilities, sentence by sentence. Steadily giving forth! As often or not a sentence will just not hold up to the surrounding sentences, & when that happens I delete the flaccid sentence & start over.

These are the sentences I've written so far today for the piece:

My problems arouse me : the flowerings infected,
steadily giving forth, hysterical.

Thus I am like a woman & need these things
explained to me.

A finger has an eye & an ear & other openings.

A knife in the sun.

Although my cradle was burned hours ago I still am
sleep.

Every month I think of my family for a solid hour,
of smallness facing the world,

I haven't finished that last sentence yet, & chances are I'll rewrite it again tomorrow, starting with "every" & rethinking my approach. The strongest sentence in the above grouping, I think, is the fairly offensive "Thus I am like a woman" one, if only because it seems to pin a voice down for a moment: it explicitly presents a value system. It's hopefully the magnet for the surrounding sentences. My first impulse, then, in the "Every month" sentence I'm working on, is to try to create an almost pitiable sentence, one to empathize with. Just out of sheer meanness, perhaps, I enjoy the idea of trying to turn up the velocity from a pretty obnoxiously sexist statement through indeterminate poetic observations to a sentence about family & fear that most readers will maybe identify with. So there's a certain energy I'm trying to create, as well as an impression of immediate, unscripted, accidental utterance. I'm also seeing to what degree I'm willing to push language into value systems that I don't share, even if I'm doing so with some ironic distance. If it takes me ten years to do these things then I should find a different job. I'm hoping to create this energy-pattern either after I finish typing this email or first thing tomorrow morning, maybe after taking a shower. Then I'll write some more sentences & see what energies I can exploit from those. So that's my approach to revision right this second.

Tony Tost

Tony Tost is the author of **Invisible Bride** and co-editor of **Octopus**. He lives with his fiancée Leigh Plunkett in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where both participate in activities involving the Lucifer Poetics Group. Tony has recent critical and poetic work in *Jacket*, *Verse*, *Typo*, *Spoon River*, *The Displayer*, *Forklift*, *Ohio* and the forthcoming anthology . . . and **Gentlemen: 15 Younger Male American Poets**.



Left to right: Tony, Leigh, Robert & Diana Plunkett.
Photo credit: Ron Tost.

Note: All interviews in this issue were finalized in September 2004.

1.

The pure products of Omaha go.
They shall meet again somewhere inside the baffled
pages.
They go on-stage to play with lions.
Moreover the voiceover: "There are memories every
night, the secret is pushing the animal into the
correct cage *without you or the animal ever*
recognizing the cage. Without *you or the animal*
ever moving. And without my help, for *I* will be in
the muddy pond-water, wondering about my whereabouts."

& there is fog in the middle of my interview as I ask
my potential employer about hallelujah & swallowing
snakes & he says, "Cages everywhere. The secret is
not being an animal."

If I say disco is back is it the same as saying the
rats are only animals if I want them to be?
The shoppers pause as a pair of owls abandons their
bodies.
Someone laughs in his or her tradition.
Now pity.
Measured inside & out.
A soldier pities the girl he lays himself down as.
If a bullet knows the velocity of such anger, then it
has an extraordinary opportunity : I went from New
York to Omaha & didn't kill a thing.

2.

I used to carry a memory around.
Now I carry a winner.
Every new dance is a new test & each time I pass
easily for I refuse to answer any questions.
My soldier eats with a fork, stands on a path, feels
the company of shades, relies upon a mystery not of
his own creation but he still cuts the cakes I bring,
still warms my shovel.
Also out of the mist comes more mist: "many journeys
lie ahead for me, parallel to yours, yet I will remain
as before, without alteration, weeping over my
shadow."

3.

A powerful wind lifts a dog into a bullet's
path.
The dog does not put on the bullet's power.
So much for superficial form.

*Where were you during the hurricanes?
Outside of Florida?*

I was at home in Washington DC.
However, I'm relocating to Miami on
October 1st. Finally I'll be back home—
hurricanes or no hurricanes!

*Your parents were from Cuba, you were
born in Madrid. Have you ever visited
either place?*



Yes. I've been to Cuba several times. The second part of my first book, **City of a Hundred Fires**, is comprised of poems from my travels and experiences in Cuba. I always say I went "back" to Cuba even though I was born in Madrid, only because it feels that way—like a place I left a long time ago. Visiting Cuba is intense for several reasons, especially since so much of my "ghost" family lives there; every time I go it is like stepping into the storybook of my life. I've also been to Madrid and visited the exact place where I was born, which was once a birthing hospital run by nuns—now it is a home for the elderly—the irony of it all!

What are your thoughts on the Castro regime?

This is a complex question which would take a book-length answer, so I'll pass. I'll only say that the older I get the more of an intellectual anarchist I've become. I don't believe in political figures or so-called leaders of any kind, including our own beloved W. I can think for myself, I don't need anyone or any group of people to do it for me.

*Have you ever written what you would call
a political poem?*

No. My natural voice is not political, per se. Though I believe any act, be it writing a poem, painting a picture, or composing a song, is a political act for the simple reason that you are questioning what exists and the order of the day.



I have read in one place that you work as a civil engineer, and in another that you work as a language consultant. What is your job, and how does it affect your poetry?



I've also been a Professor of Creative Writing and Latino Literature at the University of Central Connecticut. I see all my various careers as adding to my work, because, after all, writing relies on life-experiences, and the more you have the better off you are. Also, there having various things to do, to create, keeps one's perspective always fresh. As a matter of fact, I'm going to begin graduate school in Architecture in the Spring. Life is a banquet, and I want to taste as many things as possible. I have faith that it will all add up someday.

Richard Blanco

Blanco's first book, **City of a Hundred Fires**, received the Starrett Poetry Prize (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998). His second book, **Nowhere Yet Here** is forthcoming from the University of Arizona Press Camino del sol Series. Blanco's work on the Cuban-American experience has appeared in *The Nation*, *Indiana Review*, *Michigan Quarterly*, *TriQuarterly*, *National Public Radio*, and anthologies including, **The Best American Poetry 2000** and **American Poetry: The Next Generation**. He is a Bread Loaf Fellow and recipient of a Florida Artist Fellowship. A builder of Bridges and poems, Blanco holds a degree in Civil Engineering and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Florida International University. A former Assistant Professor at Central Connecticut State University, Blanco now lives in Washington, D.C. where he has taught creative writing at Georgetown and American University.



LOOKING FOR BLACKBIRDS, HARTFORD

Your postcard from Varadero Beach is on my dresser at home, where the surf of it rolls day and night making mild Cuban sounds

—Wallace Stevens, letter to José Rodríguez Feo

8/16

Ladies in charcoal and pink Chanel suits
sip hot Chai from glass mugs at Michael's.
They mind the afternoon with eyes fixed
on the side of their faces, like blackbirds.

10/14

The rose-thatched gazebo at Elizabeth Park
has bared itself into a cloud of thorny vines
where even blackbirds do not perch.

11/1

Along a row of Perfect-Six town homes,
a woman matted by a field of red brick
caws out of a third floor window like
a blackbird needing other blackbirds.

12/19

Near the end of fall the black leaves
look like feathers strewn over lawns.

12/21

After the first snowfall nothing remains
black, not even the night. Nothing breaks
the white reverence, not even a blackbird.

1/5

The reservoir has hardened into a bed of ice
expanding, groaning. It's the only sound I hear
complaining of winter through the mountains.

1/28

Airplanes pass. Their shadows land like black
birds on the snowy fields before the runway.

2/3

The buildings downtown stand like chess pieces
in a stalemate against the frozen riverfront
that will not break until a blackbird flies.

Richard Blanco

2/24

The Portuguese men in heavy black coats
gather like blackbirds at La Estrella heckling
over Old World days and the World Cup.

3/18

All the bakery cases along Franklin Avenue
in Little Italy, glitter with sprinkled cannoli,
anise candies, and iced cookies. But no pies.

4/2

At the bus stop on Park and Main, I catch
humming birds hovering in the rainforest eyes
of puertorriqueños. Where are my pájaros negros?

4/13

On the telephone lines dripping with snow
in my window, there ought to be blackbirds.
They ought to be slitting the sky open.

WINTER OF THE VOLCANOES, GUATEMALA

Volcanoes everywhere, like cathedrals at the end
of every stretch of cobblestone I wobble through.
Volcanoes triangulating the view in every window,
and reading over my shoulder on the patio at night,
funneling the stars between their peaks, threatening
to grumble and leave *La Antigua* to rise a third time
out of ruin. Volcanoes, keeping watch like a jury
of five gods: Acatenango, Fuego, Tejamulco, Agua,
and Pacaya, the one I climbed, step by step through
rows of corn groomed like manes by Mayan hands,
through the quilt work of terrace farmers' patches,
through clouds veiling through pinewood forests,
until I walked in pumice fields, barren as the moon, if
the moon were black, and spelled out my name with
freshly minted stones I laid down to claim I was here
on this newly kilned rock that in a few eons will be
the soil of the valley, the earth I savor in my coffee,
the dust that settles over the sills and counter tops.
I scaled the peak, reached the crater, and stood
balanced on its igneous lip, speechless, looking
into the cauldron of molten, blood-orange petals,
a pearlescent fire, an open wound weeping smoke,
terrified I might fall, terrified that, for a moment,
I'd let myself be seduced by the pure, living heart
of the raw earth, saying: here, let me take you back.

Darlene

David Hernandez

She chops the Amazonian strain mushroom,
a small rubber umbrella splitting open

and open. Lets the pieces fall from her hand
into a blender hemorrhaging cranberry juice.

Chatter and whiz, crimson dulled to mauve.
She drinks and waits for her mind's funhouse

to open its double-doors. On the carpet again
staring at the painting, seascape on velvet.

Soon the waves begin to crash against a shore
dark as obsidian, crest upon crest unfurling

like a fistful of shook tinsel. The glittered
hours sail past and still on the floor,

spellbound by this celestial ocean. Twilight
when she turns to the green leaf stuck

to the window-screen. No, not a leaf,
but a hummingbird, its needle-beak caught

in the mesh. It flutters and rests, flutters
and rests until she cages the bird in her hands,

its heart clicking wildly against her palm.
She could go nowhere or anywhere now.

She opens his fingers. And by opening,
paints the sky with a stroke of emerald.



{Featured Artist Frederic Manton}

David Hernandez

David Hernandez's first full-length book of poems, **A House Waiting for Music**, was published by Tupelo Press. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *TriQuarterly*, *Southern Review*, *Epoch*, *Iowa Review*, *Cream City Review*, *AGNI* and *Quarterly West*. His drawings have also appeared in literary magazines, including *Other Voices*, *Gargoyle*, and a feature in *Indiana Review*. A recipient of a grant from the Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation, his chapbook collections include **Man Climbs Out of Manhole** and **Donating the Heart**. David is the poetry editor for *Swink*. He lives in Long Beach, CA and is married to writer Lisa Glatt. Visit his website at www.DavidAHernandez.com.



Michael Lohre

**Doris Maxa, 8, Waits For No Mail With
Her Five Sisters In Their Bedroom
Above A General Store And Dance Hall
In Seaforth, MN, Population 67, Circa
1945**

Three brothers go off to war
and Gordon whispers to young Doris,

her thin arms crucifixing the door,
"You're my favorite sister, Doris."

The first two Christmases he sends oranges
—then he is shot manning the radio

in a bomber spiraling to Germany below.
Gordon wears no parachute but the pilot

heaves his limp body out a door to the sky,
and prays for a miracle to save his life.

Neil, a prisoner but alive near Berlin,
never sees his brother's body tumbling.

He scratches at his hand near a camp fence—
mining for lice and dreaming tunnels.

Gordon must roll his eyes east to Russell,
the muscular Marine fighting in a foxhole

of sweltering volcanic ash and sulfur
on Iwo Jima. Gordon sees the pill boxes

hiding Kuribayashi and that violent job
with high wages in flames and bodies.

There is nothing to do but keep dying,
to see the war's end and Russell surviving

only to be killed by a passenger train
while driving to make Seaforth from Maine

after being served divorce papers
and a fifth of whiskey on his brain.

So hit this earth, Gordon. Make your own grave.
Your little sister lives in this Creation

and she rolled your oranges in the winter cold.
Her hands peeled each skin from its home

in three white pieces, dried them by the stove,
and carried them away when they turned gold.

With skins and scissors, her hands make the shapes
of butterflies and of brothers and of angels.

Doris pins their wings into the empty walls:
Doris has a design for you to be beautiful.

The Holy Ghost Of September, 1969

I walked up beneath her elbow
and touched one finger

to my mother's forearm,
her hands still on dishes

in the sink. She flinched
like she had been bitten

by a fish. Her Bible black hair
flinched. When mother looked

down at me she didn't move
her lips or her jaw to speak.

She said, You don't love me
either. My father continued

eating. I remember his pale
blue eyes marching around

the walls. He wiped angelfood
cake crumbs from his plate

with his brown shirt sleeve.
This is my first clear memory.

There was still cake bearing a few
yellow flames on the counter.

I ate the candles and loved them.



Michael Lohre was born and raised on a cash crop and livestock farm in southern Minnesota. He currently teaches writing at The Ohio State University-Marion. His poems and stories have appeared in *Doubletake*, *The Kenyon Review*, and *Grain*, among others. He is at work on his first novel: **The Long Run of Robert Red Cloud**.

Romancing The Numbers

Miranda, naked, sits cross-legged on the bed.
She is loving a man with her eyes only
because he does not exist. She has made him
up in her mind and he is the perfect lover.
His kisses cover her body, reach every crevice,
shed new light on darkness.

Miranda rocks back and forth and shakes her head,
counting beats of her heart. She is practicing Love
in the Perfumed Garden, the Arabic way.
She is on number fourteen and by the time
she reaches twenty-five, she will die of ecstasy.
She knows this and does not mind.

"Desire is the wish for heaven," she says,
her hands fluttering like hummingbirds
around her body. She feels them peck and bite,
knows the power of suggestion.
What, after all, is reality, but a different spatial plane,
a riddle we move to, traveling in circles?

It is not the answer, she thinks, that binds us,
it is the question unasked—
the one where purpose is not a definition
but an adventure yet to be had.
Miranda sighs, lies down and closes her eyes.
Her lover sleeps, then brings her gently to fifteen.

Barbra Nightingale



{Featured Artist Frederic Mantos}

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Barbra Nightingale



Barbra Nightingale has had over 200 poems accepted for or published in numerous poetry journals and anthologies. Her latest manuscript, *The Geometry of Dreams*, explores the relationship between language and math, and is looking for a publisher. **Singing in the Key of L**, her first full length collection, won the 1999 Stevens Poetry Manuscript Award and was published by the National Federation of Poetry Societies (June, 1999). She is a Professor of English at Broward Community College, South campus, Florida.

Russell Interviews Nightingale~A MiDO Mini-Interview

*One of my favorite poems in your collection, **Singing in the Key of L**, is "Pedestals." Is the "problem with sculptors" also a problem with poets when they over-revise a piece, or "blinded by the art" they polish away eccentricities that made the poem interesting in the first place? Yes, that is an underlying theme. Sometimes it is the imperfections that make something unique and even more loved. It is dangerous to want perfection, sometimes.*

Along the same lines, Wallace Stevens once wrote, "To a large extent, the problems of poets are the problems of painters and poets must often turn to the literature of painting for a discussion of their own problems." Do you agree with Stevens? If yes, why do you think it is easier to discuss one method in terms of another?

Yes, I do agree, and the reason is that paintings are visual representations and what poets do, of course, is paint with words, thereby making their words very visual as well. The language of criticism in any media is often the same.

I enjoyed your collection, "Singing in the Key of L." The poems are full of sensuous physical and sensory details, intelligence and a broad emotional range including humor, desire, and vulnerability. When you are working on a collection, how much does organization come into play, or do you intentionally place poems closer and farther apart so that the poems illuminate one another besides having their own revelations?

Actually, I am never working on a "collection." The collection comes after I gather the poems I've written. I just write. Then, in putting together a collection, I look for poems with commonalities, and not surprisingly, actually, I find there are quite a few. However, I have published 4 books now, and they are actually different. At least I think they are. There are some similarities, of course, but they are different enough to be different collections, not just divisions of the same. In organizing what I gather together, I look for how the poems compliment one another, how they look on the page across from one another, how one ends and another begins. I hope that they leave an echo which is picked up by each subsequent poem.

What are you working on now? How is your current work different from your collection "Singing in the Key of L"?

My newest manuscript is called The Geometry of Dreams. It is similar to Singing in that it explores a certain kind of language (Singing was musical); this one is mathematical, actually. It explores the relationships among us in both linear and non-linear ways.

I also have a collection called Sweet Insomnia, which is looking for a home, and that one consists of many of my Miranda poems, juxtaposed with "regular" poems on similar themes, so that it's like looking into a mirrored image.

Both of these are looking for a home.

E. Ethelbert Miller

Borderline

You walk into a new bookstore
because you love books. You love
sports too but there's no game like
writing. Oh, but you never learned
to dribble. The critics call you Little
League. Now you walk to the poetry
section and there's Maya Angelou's
books, all of them. On a lower shelf
you find the letter M. Your books
should be here, maybe next to Madhubuti
or not far from Milton. You're not here
and you're not there. You look for ME.
That begins with M doesn't it?

Emmett Till Looks At A Photo Album From Iraq

Sometimes I try to remind folks that Money,
Mississippi was a jail too.

Hoods come in all sizes.

I look at the pictures in this book
and see myself

whistling at the lady guard
who gives the thumbs up.

Life is an open coffin
when we live with our eyes closed.

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E. Ethelbert Miller



E. Ethelbert Miller is the former chair of the Humanities Council of Washington, D.C. and a core faculty member of the Bennington Writing Seminars at Bennington College in Vermont. He has been the director of the African American Resource Center at Howard University since 1974. Author and editor of several books of poetry including *Where Are the Love*

Poems for Dictators? How We Sleep on the Nights We Don't Make Love and In Search of Color Everywhere.

His memoir *Fathering Words: The Making of an African American Writer* was published in 2000. It was selected by the DC WE READ program in 2003 as the book all Washington residents were encouraged to read.

Mr. Miller has been honored by Laura Bush and the White House at the National Book Festival in 2001 and 2003. His poetry has been heard on the HBO Def Jam Poetry program. Mr. Miller can also be heard on a regular basis on National Public Radio.

Recently he became one of the editors of *Poet Lore* magazine and a board member of the Writer's Center in Bethesda, Maryland. (*visit web site*)

TERRORISM

Neither fiction nor a discourse
but flowers. The liminal edge
of what has been—the suspension
of daily activity where what is
possible outweighs the probable
crisis ever bridging backwards
into history. Prophecies to explain
why eyes are glued to glass,
why laughter seems unable
to return to the streets just yet
though “it’s safer now to travel
than ever,” messages of love
scrawled by children onto strips
of construction paper pasted
onto an American flag delivered
to a firehouse where passers-by
stop to weep. *Is that a dumpster
or the smell of rotting flesh?*
passed on in whispers—the upper
level deck of the sight-seeing bus
filling up again. Should the Towers
be rebuilt? Should ashes be smeared
across our foreheads, our clothing
rent instead of lighting candles
and leaving bouquets under
the photos of those still missing?
More and more forced to take
public transportation—the carpool
rule requiring us to “buddy-up”
as we play that game of holding
our breaths as long as we can
riding through the Lincoln Tunnel—
me on my cell telling you this,
wasting away my anytime minutes
while the word “crusade” is banished
from our President’s lexicon—
reported incidents of road rage
down, your flag pin but a show
of solidarity if not a talisman
warding off those baseball bats
one Arab said to another seated
next to me—none of it really
any good against anthrax, plague
or VX gas, not even surgical
masks carried in our packs for luck.

Poems © Timothy Liu 2005. All rights reserved.

BEAUTY

Forty-six bodies identified. Others
found only in parts. A demand
for Nostradamus on the rise: *In the city
of York, there will be a great collapse—
two twin brothers torn apart by a third
big war to begin when the city burns—*
tents from Fashion Week in Bryant Park sponsored
by Mercedes Benz converted into
staging areas for the dead—dates proposed
for the Emmys though Miss America
will go on as the seventy-two virgins
of Paradise welcome the martyrs in—

Timothy Liu



Photo credit: William Fridrich
www.fridrichdesign.com

Timothy Liu is the author of five books of poems, most recently *Of Thee I Sing* (Georgia, 2004). His new book, *E. Pluribus Unum AKA Kamikazee Pilots In Paradise*, is forthcoming from Southern Illinois in 2005. An Associate Professor of English at William Paterson University, he lives in Hoboken, New Jersey.

LETTER TO BERTHA MASON ROCHESTER

If I could, I'd save you.
Flies beneath your bed hiss Bertha, Antoinette,
Bertha--though you plug your ears
with lima beans, syllables seep
in like dust pushing past closed shutters,
like locoweed creeping across the garden wall,
the mute battlements. Better to bust out of your cell,
to let the oversized roach motel burn
before your so-called-husband stuffs you
in a body bag, seals you like a cracker in a Ziploc.
I'd set you up in a beach side condo
stocked with your favorite dahlias:
Arabian Nights, Black Satins, Burma Gems.
I'd hire a good massage therapist, and enroll
you in yoga classes. I'd take you to a spa,
treat you to a mud bath, restore those charcoal
stained feet to their original hue,
have a stylist trim that cavewoman hair.
You'd take up kickboxing and swimming.
You'd see a shrink who specializes in pyromania,
who'd prescribe an antidepressant cocktail
for those unpredictable mood swings and panic attacks.
After shopping for a new wardrobe, a red dress
and matching slingbacks, we'd climb the statue of Liberty,
we'd toss your straight jacket into the ocean,
and along with it each vestige of sadness
that has tinged your bloodshot eyes.
I'd make you forget Edward.
I'd cradle your face in my hands and I'd kiss you,
a hypnotic lip-lock extinguishing each bad memory,
obliterating suffering from your lexicon.
Bertha, if I could, I'd save you.

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Rita Maria Martinez

CAUSE AND EFFECT

Because her left hip is higher
than the right, she measures the pool
water's pH every day. Because
her right breast is larger than the left,
she is skeptical of new & improved
laundry detergent, of buy-one-
get-one-free advertisements.
She puckers, she contours, she
slathers her kisser with Pink
Panther lipstick before slipping
under plaid quilts because
there's a macaroni-shaped scar
on her lip. And because her lips continue
to move after she finishes speaking,
she reads the Bible, wears red flannel,
says she's the first female to speak
a silent tongue. The mystery
in her life ponders why she pours
ketchup across the periphery
of her burger before every bite, why
she refuses to eat scrambled eggs
unless she sprinkles a dash
of salt for each of pepper.
And because her left eye twitches
when she eats, she pitches her fork
into a piece of chocolate cream
pie and pops it in her mouth
for the cast of *Unsolved Mysteries*,
for *The National Enquirer*,
for *The Guinness Book of World Records*

NAUTICA

I was walking toward the bus stop
when a guy whizzed by like a bike messenger.
I can't tell you what he looked like
or what he wore, only that the scent
of his cologne lingered as if saying hello--
and that he smelled like you, like the blue flask
of Nautica you kept in your glove
compartment, like my purple turtleneck
on nights I sank into bed carrying
your scent the way little girls
carry dolls to their beds, the way men
carry loose change in their pockets
all day, without realizing.



Rita Maria Martinez lives in Miami, Florida. She is a writer and proofreader for Miami Dade College. A graduate of Florida International University's M.F.A. Creative Writing Program. Rita's poems have appeared in Gulf Stream Magazine, Diagram, Mangrove, Street Miami and Ploughshares.

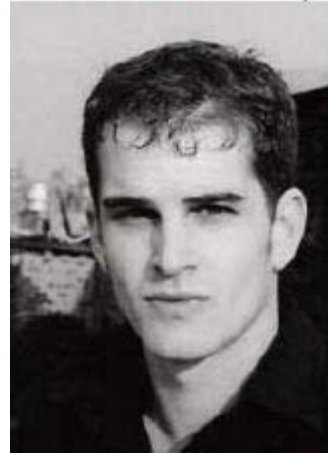
CHERRIES IN THE FACTORY OF BLACKNESS

Even where the cherry emits the only
glow; "can I bum a smoke" and I
love you like an alibi; over the sterno
a marshmallow on a pitchfork blackens;
where the absence of the sparkling is an earring
adored yet neglected in a tackle box, a snelled
fishhook threaded through her lobe in lieu
of the perfectly compassed silver hoop;
Even where security in the dim is a form
of barking through dulled molars;
according to the plummet, according to the dark;
of course a power outage then the tyranny
of the fuse box; near the wick of the lambent
candle on the table a parabola of blue-
blackness inside light inside black-
blueness; close the eyes and squeal;
Even where deeper registers of color
locate deeper registers of sound; the neurotic
wail of an unseen killdeer, a man leaning
into formica to order the appetizer
"bluebirds over bullet wounds";
the moss-rot smell of indigo space;
according to the plummet, according to the dark;
Even where water alone refuses its own
claustrophobia and every memento
is a form of onyx; the stoic bronze monkey
on the platter's all shadows and balances
a basket of black opium on his head;
chase the dragon, close the eyes;
look, the hood torn off at dusk to run
screaming through the cherry trees;
Even where at this color and hour you remove
your sadness, fold it in thirds, and place it
at the foot of the mattress to keep
warm for wearing in better light

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Kate Evans's poetry, stories, and essays have appeared, or are forthcoming, in *The North American Review*, *Seattle Review*, *Santa Monica Review*, *The National Poetry Review*, *Under the Sun*, *Elixir*, *Rhino*, *Harrington Lesbian Fiction Quarterly*, and others. Her book, **Negotiating the Self: Identity, Sexuality, and Emotion in Learning to Teach**, was published by Routledge in 2002. She lives in Santa Cruz, California and teaches at U.C. Santa Cruz.

Ted Mathys



Ted Mathys's first book of poetry, **Forge**, is forthcoming from Coffee House Press in 2005. Poems have appeared or are slated to appear in *Aufgabe*, *Black Warrior Review*, *The Canary*, *Colorado Review*, *Fence*, *Jubilat*, *Ploughshares*, and elsewhere. Originally from Ohio, he currently lives in Manhattan. Photo credit: Leah Wiste.

Kate Evans

Above the Town

Sometimes I like to pretend we're Chagall
and Bella, flying like kites above the town,
afloat in air like sea. Yes, the painting's fairly

water-like, greens, grays, blues, Bella's hair
buoyant, her arm drifting, her black gown
pulling down at the throat. And Chagall's

arm around her, his leg outspread—he's pulling
her ashore. God, he is. She has drowned,
you can see she's gone, her flat unblinking stare,

and his eyes are ringed with gray. There,
can't you see? He jumped in when he found
her floating, her seaweed black hair, the pall

of her alabaster skin. Without him, she'd fall
to the town below. Fueled by overpowering
grief and love, he transforms water to air,

that's all he can do, I see now, just barely
hold on. Now I see a grave in the sky, down
and up reversed. One of us will die first.

Poem © Kate Evans 2005. All rights reserved.

Color Blind

So I can't know my blue mind. So what? So I've never visited the house where he lives with his wife and dogs, where I sometimes imagine him dozing in his blue hammock, while the mutts sniff around in the bushes or scratch their fleas and whine—

My green mind is smitten by every pretty woman he sees, so he stays home and watches TV to be safe, while my red mind wakes at all hours and barks for no reason, annoying us all.

My yellow mind might be content to be a river or a small forest pond, clean enough to drink.

What fun to swim naked in water that clean, to dive to the bottom, where it's numbing cold, and taste that clarity! But what I really mean

is this: In the vast mind of purple that still looks black to my colorblind eyes, my father lay down some nights and told me a story and fell asleep beside me. When my mother looked in and saw us lying there, she leaned down, kissed us and turned off the light. Then I'd hear her

playing loud records. I'd hear her singing songs in languages she didn't know. I'd hear her making phone calls, and I'd smell the rich aromas of her cooking, of her perfume. I heard her drive away one night, forever. But the next night she came in, lay down beside me and slept, turning gray.

Michael Hettich

Several Ways To Vanish

One summer afternoon my girlfriend asked me to tighten her belt so her waist would look smaller.

While she sucked her belly I pulled tight and fastened. And when she exhaled, her whole body, which was skinny and frail, bulged around her tight belt. When I reached out to unfasten the buckle, she batted my hand away playfully: you'll like me more.

A family of foxes lived beneath her parents' house. In the evening when we sat on the porch and held hands they yapped and barked softly right beneath our feet. One evening my girlfriend climbed through the crawl space between the floor and the ground to try to scare them away. She'd grown thinner every day.

I could hear her crawling below us while her father talked about varnishes and waxes and different kinds of oil, about lubricants and additives, sealants and adhesives. He talked about plumbing supplies, about deck stain and mildew. I watched fireflies rise from the damp grass into the star-filled sky.

Her mother brought out a plate of warm cookies. My girlfriend knocked on the floor and called for a flashlight. Coming dear, we sang back in unison, chewing. Her mother poured another glass of milk.

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Michael Hettich has published twelve books of poetry, most of them chapbooks and limited editions. His poems and essays have appeared widely in such journals as *The Cimarron Review*, *Hayden's Ferry*, *The Literary Review*, *New Letters*, *TriQuarterly* and *Witness*. He has two new books forthcoming in 2005. He lives with his family in Miami.

Sun Valley Serenade

James Brock

For the black ice number, the choreographer
writes his dance on Sonja Henie, marks
where she will commit to one final spin,
picking her toe to stop, smiling directly

to the camera. The trick: how to keep
the movement slow, so as not to slice
into the black ice, dyed with ink, spitting
onto her outfit, which must be white,

and her hair, which must be blonde.
And for this year, 1940, late fall, Idaho
is Hollywood, two years after Averell Harriman
has opened the resort—and also in

production, it's A Woman's Face, and
Joan Crawford walks through an exterior
shot. Through this early winter snow
she leaves the doctor's office, her scar

erased by surgery: the woman with the
cold heart becomes the beautiful woman
with the cold heart, a monster, declares
Melvyn Douglas, the surgeon in love with

his work. It's Gary Cooper visiting Hemingway
for goose hunting, and they will return later
in the season, when the Nicholas Brothers
and Glenn Miller and Dorothy Dandridge

have arrived, although Hemingway will say
how the only Negress artist remains Josephine
Baker, and Coop will tell Hemingway
there he goes again, all full of Paris. Hemingway

will get the last word, that Paris and war
gave Gary Cooper his greatest role.
For the movie stars, nothing but to stroll
the Sun Valley Inn, loiter by the outdoor

ice rink at night, as the director of photography
reads his light meter against the black ice,
what Zanuck had ordered specifically for this movie.
Henie's a tired franchise already, but still on

contract. "Make the ice look like a floor,

something that Rogers and Astaire would glide
over." But he budgets \$7000 for the scene, enough
for two days of shooting, and nothing more.

For the final take, it's Henie in her last available
outfit, the other costumes stained
from the falls, the ink beading in its freezing,
and she cries to her director, it's "grooty,"

meaning "gritty" or "grouty," but he has
seen this panic before, and Zanuck has warned him,
too, of Henie in particular, all
excuses and ermine, and so it's Henie,

and she's on her final spin, crisp
through and through, the spin tightening,
and before she cleats the ice, everyone
can see the centrifuged run of ink

lip her skirt, see the two days
in the tank, and she sees it, too, still
in her spinning, but why not keep the spinning,
with all these lights, all these people?

And she owes them everything, waiting
through war and Depression and boredom,
she owes them some Olympian razz-a-ma-tazz,
something that will make someone in

the audience gasp oh. What's a goddess for?
Who cares if it's Zanuck's show? His lousy dime?
Why not deliver the real goods this time?
Hit it, Sonja! Hit it!

Poems © James Brock 2005. All rights reserved.



James Brock is the author of two books of poetry, *The Sunshine Mine Disaster* and *Nearly Florida*. His poetry has recently been published in *North American Review*, *Sunspinner*, *Caffeine Destiny*, and *88*. Currently he lives in Fort Myers, where he is an Associate Professor of English at Florida Gulf Coast University. For kicks, he travels between Miami, Nashville, and Idaho.

ACCIDENT REPORT

"I couldn't push my street-parked old sedan through the snow plow's nine inch wall of ice, so I trudged downstairs, scaring basement mice, and climbed into my brand new mini van with four wheel drive, keyless entry and a thermometer and an electric compass, which I call my Global Positioning Device. I started up, eased on the gas, and rammed the right side frame of my garage's door, shearing off my power side view mirror (two hundred dollars plus an hour's labor). Then I backed up and crumpled my rear hatch just enough so that it will not latch. (Six hundred more). I walked to the liquor store."

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Richard Cecil



Richard Cecil's fourth collection of poems is **Twenty First Century Blues** (Southern Illinois University Press). He teaches in the Spalding Brief Residency MFA program and at Indiana University, Bloomington.

Eleventh Hour of Aquarius

Midnight comes as it always does
in the whispering trees; half moon
bruised sky, the sound of soft rain
falling is your lover weeping, a child
crying for her mother in the dark
or a wild animal scratching at the window.

A woman's scream shatters
the illusion of dream; you are not swimming
and she is not the Lady of the Lake, Water
Bearer, lover of Virgo. She is your curse,
witch, some other woman and you must
witness her drowning break your heart.

You cannot rescue her, nor she, you. She is
and is not you; but you do not know this
stranger who betrays the womb—part lamb,
part wolf in panther skin who stalks your sleep,
endless night, possessed and voracious
she is bleeding and this is her cycle
of forgetfulness in drink;

her remembrance torn to flesh, she will
devour and chew off her own leg to free
herself and beg forgiveness. And I ask you
what salvation is there in the ache of a phantom
limb, taste of iron, bitter salt. Tell me
tell me, tell me.

Poem © Mia 2005. All rights reserved.

Richard Cecil

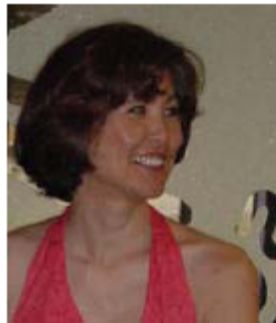
AUTUMN GETAWAY

The dollar's sinking. By June, I won't be able
to afford to pay for a flight to Italy.
But when I trace my thumb across my globe
from Italy to North America,
I discover that the latitude of Rome's
about the same as Detroit's and Chicago's,
which means that Italy is as deprived
of sun as Indiana in December.
But sitting here, trapped in the USA,
October drizzle streaking filthy windows,
my thumb still gritty from its recent passage
from east to west, like Christopher Columbus,
across my dusty globe's blue-white Atlantic,
I'm desperate to delude myself with hope.
My money's losing value every minute,
so shouldn't I lock in this bargain airfare
before Northwest withdraws it or goes bankrupt?

Three hundred dollars round trip to Milan!
I'll slosh through soggy Venice soaking up
Chianti, Prosecco, and the Renaissance,
then board a south bound Euro Star and ride
until the sun breaks through the overcast,
or else the train runs out of land to cross.
In that case I'll climb down in Brindisi
and wheel my suitcase to the ferry dock
and buy low-season deck-class to Corfu,
where, I've heard, it rains throughout November.
So I'll sail south to Ithaca, then Crete—
so close to Africa it must be sunny.
But, oh, the food's so bad there! Olive oil
soaks everything and there's just instant coffee
and Melba toast in plastic wrap for breakfast.
Please sail me back to gloomy Italy,
to Rome and wine and pasta—and high ceilings
that chill all rooms to fifty five degrees.
Fly me home, I cry out, in my dream.
Voila! I'm back, again, in Indiana,
warm, well-fed, not poor, still miserable.

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Mia



Mia, editor of *Tryst*, was born in Korea. She graduated from the University of Texas with a Bachelor's in Creative Writing. Her most recent poetry has been published at *Lotus Blooms*, *Ariga*, *MiPo Zines*, *three candles*, *Pixiport* and others. Her archived work is available at *Mentress Moon*, *Wired Hearts/Wired Art*, *Pierian Springs*, *Snow Monkey Press*, and *Comrades*.

Michael Schiavo

The Town Where God Will Ret

In a tangled country, when all the camphor
Unlit has been drawn out, when all going is gone,
And the watchmen no longer ask questions,
Only then will love without its veil be put before.
She placed her right hand behind my head
(Not one single hint of sisters or December),
And carried me pleasant into the blessed
House where I roamed for hours. Spears and banners
Overcame. Who is this that calls beloved?
A prodigal without swine. A bumpkin slipping
Into the thick of the theater crowd, comforting
A woman who beckons only a temporary bed.
There is a seal over his mouth and no mountain
Moves toward him. The lamp is kept low.
So there comes, in our dark night, over the nation,
A carillon sounding a sound that means us go.

A thirsty woman never questions water.
Who knows of love that has not swallowed black
Milk to make himself whole? They whisper your
Secrets without a single insinuation of cunt or cock,
A tedious pageant meant somehow to pour
Pleasure into the raveled hearts among the briar.
My love is diesel and overgrown, a liquor mired
In apathy's faucet, honey in the well, cracked.
Smoke decrying our statehood rages offshore,
Pushing up the stairwell, blackening the spire's
Must. You said it to me once, now I say it back:
Never mistrust the simplicity of desire.

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Michael Schiavo's poetry has appeared in *LIT*, *McSweeney's*, *Unpleasant Event Schedule*, *Good Foot*, *La Petite Zine*, *Small Spiral Notebook*, and several other fine publications. A work-study scholar (waiter) at the 2004 Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, he currently lives in Connecticut.



Mike Alexander

DECODER RING

Super Sugar Crisps scramble across kitchen floor,
as I pull from a newly opened box, my prize,
a secret decoder ring. The pieces snap together,
an alphabet on a ring that fits around my thumb,
but looks like it could tell the orbit of planets,
or unravel fingerprints under a microscope.
With my secret decoder ring, I decipher
the Volkswagen's license plate, chalk
on the asphalt, the serial code on my bike.
I translate any word into its inner arithmetic.
I fill spiral notebooks with qabalistic equations.
My name, thirteen, nine, eleven, five, which
adds up to thirty-eight, can turn one notch
to the right, into fourteen, ten, twelve, & six,
& I disappear into my codified gematria.
Whatever I decode, I can code again.
I spin the dial, my schoolwork falls behind,
my cereal bowl encompasses the Milky Way,
life breaks into the seven basic food groups.
My vision blurs, & when it clears, I see the earth
itself, a decoder ring, spinning to riddle out
a number like infinity. I see my parents
as number-clusters, multiplying & dividing,
some assembly required, batteries not included.
I see check out lines at the Stop n' Shop.
The future is written on the cover of TV guide.
The revolution will be colorized by TNN.
I tremble at all my decoder ring reveals to me.
The cultural cleansing of my people begins, before
I ever get the chance to answer the \$64,000 question,
before Steve Allen ridicules Kerouac to his face,
before Noxema, before Spic n' Span, before Pillsbury,
before Ed Sullivan goes off the air, before bed-time.
Women no longer wear spotless cotton gloves.
Men stop wearing hats that smell of Arthur Miller.
I see my comic books taken away for my own good,
my DC Giant Batman annual buried in the trash,
Green Lantern, my light & my protection, burnt out,
the complexions of future generations sacrificed
to Aveda ritual, age cream, botox, rhinoplasty,
as angels perform double-helix kama-sutra
configurations to tempt the Super Sugar Bear,
out of diddling with his own secret ring.
I wake up, having missed the best cartoons,
the cornerstone of any nutritious eschatology.
My head is stamped with the Bear's trademark.
Copyright in Excelsis. Free gift inside.
Act now while supply lasts.

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Mike Alexander coordinates a weekly reading series, now in its eighth year, at Helios in Houston, TX, & moderates an internet sonnet workshop at the Sonnet Board. He also serves as one of the associate editors of lyric poetry review. Alexander recommends the San Miguel Poetry Week in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, to anyone who'll listen. He has reviewed poetry for PoeticVoices. His poetry has appeared online & in print at Avatar, Link, Newark Review, New Orleans Review, Texas Review, Texas Observer, & other journals.

Vince Lombardi

To tell the story straight is a sin. To tell any story straight is a sin. There's only so much fun with human figures, only so much time to say what you want to say. But never tell the story straight. Or arrange different colors, make objects mere decoration. What despair it takes to make music; what despair it is to add importance to words as you talk. You will look like a goldfish when it pops its eyes out from the bowl. The fish is without sin. We are not. And don't get me started about crucifixion. I want to review all passions, however briefly, and go over my notes each morning. Listen to me: To describe mothers and trees in reference to other mothers and trees—well, that's pretty rotten. And when we get breasts flashed at us that are not our breasts, or watch movies only to look for a mirror-image of ourselves—that is terrific and understandable, respectively. So get all your ducks in a row. Kill old enemies if you have to. But the story, yes, the story, has better things to do. I used to say "song" instead of story in my speeches on this, but people said it was a bit confusing.

Daniel Nester



A Dozen Red Roses For My Darling

Asked yet another time in my hour of escaping taint, subdued and leaning in God-knows-whose loose-collared shirt, the pick and treasure, the whatnot, my astonishment at all this;

And myself, an unfriended former Virginian, this unnatural slowdance with myself—not of revolt, nor of hungry arms, not even my usual sadness—it's the woman sex that stirs me, stirs me to the deeps. Such darling instrumentals, so darling a red rose.

It's those deeps, the deeps that keep me humming.

Daniel Nester is the author of *God Save My Queen* and *God Save My Queen II*, books on his obsession with the rock band Queen. His work has appeared in *Verse*, *LIT*, *Open City*, and *Best American Poetry*. He is the editor of the online journal *Unpleasant Event Schedule*.

LAKE IVANHOE

The leasing agent told him it was gay Melrose,
but most of the neighbors ignored him,
the way they ignored each other,
& me, & the boy in love, until he smashed
not only his girlfriend's car, but every other car in front of her apartment,
a building's worth, including the police car—broke every windshield—
she didn't want to press charges—he was so upset—but the neighbors insisted;

& the pretty girl who put a coffee table of magazines in the hallway as if
inviting you to read an article while you rang her doorbell or walked up
the stairs to your own apartment—she played awfully empty music

loud with her windows open,
smiling to that emptiness;
the fighting hallway girl scream-
ing, *You're going to get me evicted*;
& then she was gone; the family, then, just
the wife & baby, both so young, the hallway
smelling of purple bubble gum—white clogs
in the hall outside her door (bad feng shui), a tiny heart carved
out of each heel—her terrible screaming, his
terrible crying, the baby's, & I never offered to sit; the English

girl in the laundry room who when I
complained about the trek down, said Yes,
*but it's nice to have so many washers—and do
all yr wash at once.* maybe
that's her secret being happy
—finding something marvelous in
all your clothes tumbling at once—her husband
smiling the last time I opened the red door & saw
him paying the pizza man—I wondered at his friendliness,
what good news had opened him, & then
the movers came & now I pass their empty
apartment, all the windows open, window to
window, people have lived here & gone for 50
years, the moon a radium moon with three questions
almost: *What shines like that? As if it were living?*
Speaking in a silver tongue?

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Kelle Groom

Kelle Groom's first collection of poems is *Underwater City* (University Press of Florida 2004). Her second collection, *Luckily*, is forthcoming from Anhinga Press. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Agni*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Luna*, *The New Yorker*, *Poet Lore*, *Witness*, and others. She works as the director of grants for the Coalition for the Homeless of Central Florida.



Photo credit: Michael Burkard

DAHABIEH

Kim Roberts

In Crimea, Florence Nightingale wore a bracelet
woven from her sister's hair—

now under glass at St. Thomas's
Hospital in London, the country's first
school for nurses.

Her mother was angry:
all the suitors she rejected.

She just wanted Florence
to be safe. After the last one—
after all, her daughter was already
29—Florence left town
to escape her mother's face

whose disappointment could be read
from left to right like a letter.

She went to Egypt
with Charles and Selena Bracebridge,
traveled in a *dahabieh* down the Nile,

and her letters home are filled with gratitude
to find herself walking where Moses walked,
under the shade of the date palms.

She wrote in her journal, *God called me
in the morning, and asked me would I do good
for him alone without reputation?*

Her mind was agitated.

Above the *ungrateful earth*
she saw a radiant sky,
where golden light poured
*not only from the sun
but from all points
of the transparent blue heavens.*

In Egypt, the land of the Arabian Nights
and the Bible, she stepped to the shore line
of every old assumption.

It was a dark and powerful river.
Although she felt weak
as an unworthy vessel,
she put her hand to the tiller
to steer.

Esteban Arellano

San Pio

*In the night, snakes gather
on San Pio's one-lane road
—it radiates July heat.*

I stand on the wooden steps
of Juan Bendito's grocery store.
A longhorn skull hangs above the entrance,
& wagon wheels line the front porch.

From the south, where stars
burn on the Rocky Mountains,
I hear a guitar, an accordion, & castanets.
An old man, a rooster lodged in his throat,
sifts twilight,
*Take the ribbon from your hair,
shake it loose and let it fall,
Lay it soft against my skin.
like the shadows on the wall ...*
Then Spanish,
& I know the song belongs to el viejo.

But my thoughts are on the one-lane road,
covered with snakes, curving
into a moon bigger than the earth,
sitting red-eyed among cactus bloom.

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Life in the Family

— after Kenneth Rexroth

It's easy when your parents are dead—I mean by now my father smells of waterweeds, my good mother smells of mud, or they lean between two hills like fused stones. Of course I wrote about them when they were alive—that was courage of a different kind, Like stealing from your neighbor's gardens in daylight, or singing in an unfamiliar church. So in those days when they could read me I wrote everything with blue ink— Blue as the star, blue as the gull, blue as the heart, blue as the air in the tree... And my mother who drank all night and my father who lived in the center of a page could see mutual love in the blue clouds of my diary.

Nothing in Particular

Because I say this is a poem
It will turn the birches earthward,
But it is also like the weather
So it will have no feeling.
Pegasus I think felt nothing
Circling Mt. Ida. This is sure.
Nature, hand,
Each is the edge of thought only,
The dream of gardens,
Not much will change this.
I swore when I was younger
Polity was in the will,
The moon rose
All a piece
With poems
And I thought of the poem
As being
Like the marks
Of hands,
The calligraphies
Of children
That might change us.
But the platonic horse
Wins finally—we slow a bit,
The moon is voiceless.
And the horse with wings
Without taking thought
Circles the mountain.

By Halves

Mind by halves thinks "ethics"—
Erases ethics, writes "only".

My uncle washed with gin
Thought "defensible" since

He was cross, he was tired...
He lost the book of ethics.

By halves we are ready.
By halves men storm a beach.

Don't we whisper in halves?
I strive to be half a man.

I ache for half the moon,
Half of love, half the luck song

Sung by the cricket
Who sings with half his leg.

Stephen Kuusisto is the author of *Planet of the Blind: A Memoir*, a New York Times "Notable Book of the Year" for 1998, and *Only Bread, Only Light*, a collection of poems from Copper Canyon Press. He teaches in the graduate creative writing program at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. He is currently working on a memoir about "the listening life" which will be published by W.W. Norton in 2005.

WHAT'S GIVEN, WHAT'S TAKEN

Light, for example, or the clapboard crack
slap of recognition, a shadowed body

entering the realm of possibility in ruin.
You enter with your arms outstretched,

your heart pumped with trembling—
a night-starved moth in your mouth.

Who will speak your name in this rubble?
The fires will continue next door, consume

this moment. Down the path, by the ravine
parentless children have learned to pull

worms out of their festering wounds.
Recognition. The names for things.

Happenstance. Remorse is the first crumb
of forgiveness. What is taken then?

Must, if it could, the cloudless sky ask?
Everything, including this short circuitry

of how memory's ash tinges your hands.
BIG ROCK

from which I cast my line, hard
against the backs of my thighs,

my father leaning against me,
brazen for how a fish will tug

hard enough to pull me under,
the way all those ancient poets

saw the moon remove its masks,
pale drunkenness of longing

for what could never be spoken.
A boy, his father, a thin lip

of sandy river, how lives ebb
from one shadow toward light.

This place, this rock, a marker
as big as that invisible fish

taking the bait into its mouth,
going down toward blissful dusk.

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Virgil Suárez

Bring Me The Rain

My mother asks what I want her to bring
me from Cuba this time she goes back,

the last time she will see her father alive,
the last time she will ever see the red of earth

beneath her feet, walking around the house
of her birth and childhood. A cement

foundation is all that's left of her history
with place, an empty well into which

she flung people to make/keep her promises.
"Bring me back the rain," I say over the phone.

I am in New York city, looking at the snow-
covered sidewalks, a man in a red parka

shoveling it like confetti out of the way.
"La lluvia," she says. It's raining

in Miami now, she tells me. There's rain
everywhere. I tell her I do not want Miami

rain, I want Cuba's rain. Only in Cuban
rain do I hear the sound of my life—crisp,

my grandmother chasing after guinea fowl
with a sharp knife hidden behind her back.

My father riding with my grandfather
on horseback, their shirts dampened with sweat,

or the rain from the hills from which they
harvest coffee. My Cuban rain, the kind

that fell on the tin roof of the chicken coop
and lulled me to sleep. The incessant rain,

horses spooked on the pastures, lighting
heavy, flashes of light and shadow against

the pale walls of my forgetting. That rain.

HOW THEY SNEAK UP ON YOU

It happens when you are ten or eleven or twelve. Your mother drags you into the underwear department at JC Penny's or Sears and asks you to choose between the two styles of training bra. You stand there gazing at the yellow rectangular boxes with a Marcia Brady-looking teen model on the front and try to choose between the white bra with tiny blue flowers all over, and the satiny beige one with a bow in the center and wonder why, suddenly, you need a bra. You glance down and are sure that nothing has changed since yesterday, you haven't sprouted overnight like a rose or mold on a tomato, yet standing there in the fluorescent light, you are quickly growing obscene in your thin, red and white baseball jersey. You want to scream and vanish in a puff of prepubescent smoke, but instead you grab the box that holds the neutral beige bra, thinking it will blend with your skin and you might be able to ignore it. On the bus, on the way home, you press the brown bag with the bra tight against your chest because you now feel exposed, because you notice how the bus driver's eyes, reflected in the rearview mirror, shift towards you.

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Terri Carrion

Terri Carrion is assistant editor for Big Bridge magazine online and is last year's director of FIU's Study Abroad Program-Creative Writing in Dublin. Terri's other poems have or will appear in *Vox*, *Slipstream*, *Pearl*, *Mangrove*, *Hanging Loose*, *The Cream City Review*, *Penumbra*, *Paper Tiger*, *TigerTail*, *Street Miami*, *The Miami Sun Post* monthly arts section Mad Love and online at *BigBridge*, *Jack Magazine*, *Dead Drunk Dublin* and *Poetic Inhalations*. Her photography will be featured in the next issues of *Jack magazine* online, *Dead Drunk Dublin* and in print in *Gulf Stream Magazine*.

The Salt of Most Unrighteous Tears

I took your towel off,
ran my finger from your nape
to the gully of your butt,

and divined, from the curvature
and notchwork of your spine,
whence you had come and where

you would take me. My eyes closed,
my mind hummed with electricity.
I was not a human being, but a human becoming

seawater under thunder clouds,
clinking its cracked hulls, pearls
and old bones. A gross of skulls

with gold teeth surfaced and clattered
their jaws. A song overcame the tumult
of waves. "Always we see you; our sockets

are mouths that drink your thoughts.
Stay with the woman; let her follow you
wherever she wishes to go. Someday

she'll take you over water. You'll fall.
She'll cry your name while naked,
rolling on the sand."

Kemel Zaldivar



{Featured Artist Frederic Mantos}

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Jayne Pupek



Jayne holds an MA in Psychology and lives near Richmond, VA. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in several online and print publications. *Primitive*, her chapbook of poetry, is forthcoming from Pudding House Press.

FIRST DRAFT

I don't want to fall asleep under charcoal skies
or wake in an empty bed, my mouth full of ash.

The place where you rested is suddenly cold,
vacant as a parking lot where no one sings,

where no one meets for heated groping
in the back seats of cars. Why is there

a bowl of red apples rotting on my table?
Did I forget to eat? Neglect to toss them out

along with verses I scribbled on the backs of napkins
when we were in love?

I have had my fill of all I once longed for.
I'm as cynical as my mother who rubs

green gel on her permed hair. I line up bobby-pins
on my bureau and remember the night

you stabbed my nipple with a pencil
because I stole a glance over your shoulder

and saw the first draft of your note
telling me goodbye.

Jayne Pupek

WITHHOLDING

This house is equal parts blood and stone.
It's mine now, but not entirely.

Walls collect sound. Mine retain voices.
At night, I hear the cricket's black song

rise through cracks in warped floorboards.
The sound doesn't drown quarrels

recorded in the woody grain. I clean
every crevice, but stones hold stain.

Blues tend to fade without dissolving.
What is left is hardly a shadow.

I find persistence where least expected.
Mold grows in dark corners.

I listen hard, strain to hear bread sprout,
an event deafening in its silence.

My lover planted poppies in the window boxes
before she left. They wilt in mid-day sun.

How much water do they need?
If I ever knew, I've forgotten.

Set in fields, poppies survive.
Nature strengthens by withholding.

Perhaps it's the same with a woman.
Withhold love, watch how far she'll go to find it.



(Featured Artist Frederic Mantos)

Zachary Schomburg

What I Found in the Forest

1.

I found a group of inappropriately dressed women inside a hollowed out tree. They all had hidden agendas. When I asked Carlita her name, she told me Madeline. When I asked why they were in a hollowed out tree, all of them became suspiciously uneasy—particularly Madeline (Carlita) who told me to stop talking, and to look deep into her eyes.

2.

I found a group of unusually located trees flowering inside a hollowed out woman. They all seemed to be deciduous. When I climbed the smallest one, it bent underneath my weight. When I climbed the strongest one, I could see forever. But what I saw was a dark forest of hollowed out women, inappropriately dressed, growing trees inside themselves.

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Lisa Gordon

Happy Hour

Blast of jukebox plays decibel dervish
to your still stature, filled full
of vodka & sound that someone not here
perhaps thought of as more than a barrier
to actually having to listen or talk
to anyone behind/beside/beyond himself.

Or avoided thinking,
like you mean to be doing now,
in this reddish light looking down
into icy glass
gamely half full.

The man one stool over drinks beer.
You feel it when he turns his head
curiously toward you. You manage not
to look up.

*Filled full, you think,
equals fulfilled.*

The thought falls short
of spawning anything more.

Now, for as long as the music blares,
it will be perfectly safe for you
to look up or not.

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Lola Haskins

Instructions from the Couturier

Pull up the dress of the waters. How clear it is,
how small bright fish swim across your chest.
Now let the day dim and the edge of the sky turn
green then rose. Let the sun sink behind the
horizon like a coin into a slot. And let the jackpot
dark come on with its millions of stars, huge
bowls of them emptying over your upturned face.

Wear in your ears the evening song of the wren.
From now on, as you tilt your head left and right
before the mirror, there will flourish these tiny
shinings. Notice how the wren's bourree enters—
the hammer and the anvil and the stirrup
arranged on each side, like girls at a dance, to
take it in.

Decorate your shoulders with the bream in the
pond. You can feel their flat leaps like epaulets as
if you've been promoted to a rank you could not
have imagined, in a military to which you did not
know you belonged. Soon you will be striding out
to sweep the unhappy, like fallen leaves, into
piles, to say, fish flapping at your shoulders, *just
look at yourselves, red and orange and yellow,
like fires without a match, just look!*

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After monstrous and cruel things

PJ Nights

Oscar Wilde imagines tulips
brushing his ankles.

Lilies-of-the-valley brush hers –
in this green hour a flower
short in stature whose pervading perfume

rises from the deep dark dirt
they bed down upon.

Oscar Wilde imagines tulips
brushing his ankles –
their panther faces, eager and upturned
crawling into his arms

from a white cemetery on the first
affectionate day of spring.

Oscar Wilde imagines two lips,
hers this tiny woman
still wearing dark's cloak heavily
about her shoulders.

The day ignites slowly, with words
stolen from ancient angels –
the earth breathes through
the louche of new grass.

Oscar Wilde imagines

her lips, tulips – her large sighs
for weeping willows unbuttoned.

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PJ Nights lives by the sea, buys most of her books from the “wall of poetry” at the Gulf of Maine Bookstore, and teaches astronomy and physics at an inland urban high school. The banjo has been put aside for poetry, family, and work, but this is temporary (hopefully! she misses fiddle tunes!).

My Jazz Doem

Paul Guest

It has no jazz in it but the ice hands
of a woman I loved. Outside, no
snow but it was winter. Inside, with art
I waited for her, staring up at
decoupage and crenellated mixed media—
fabric trapped in paint like
a moth in sap. I looked up. The ceiling
receded into soundproofing.
I thought of the word *baffle*, thinking
I'd tell her. I felt the cloud of her hands
with her laugh upon my ears,
baffled, numb in an instant but thawing.
Later, during the play, in darkness
she shed her bra, there where she sat
beside me, tucking it away,
black lace like an etched cloud, like a winter
no one could understand. I
wanted to ask why. I wanted her
not to say. We left before the curtain
meant for us to and next door
live jazz throbbed like a creature
but it was cold and the air had claws,
we kept going. I hummed
later alone, each note fog,
my lips pressed to the horn of the night.



Paul Guest is the author of *The Resurrection of the Body* and *The Ruin of the World*. His poems appear in *Poetry*, *Crazyhorse*, *Slate*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Gulf Coast* and elsewhere.

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It is too much a part of things,
even though the source is not within.

In small American cities
with and without universities,

it keeps a constant presence
in the Confucian sense,

the inner arriving to match
the outer, spirit not separate

from matter (the latter illusion
left by the missions

the people have made such fine
use of). There are times

when you have to pretend
to embrace an idea or befriend

your adversaries. If constantly
misinterpreted, use the mystery

as currency. You have to start
somewhere. Be wise: depart

from where they've already put you.
A country itself can't betray you.

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Adrienne Su



Adrienne Su, author of *Middle Kingdom* (Alice James Books, 1997), is poet-in-residence at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Her work is anthologized in *Poetry 30*, *Poetry Daily*, *The New American Poets*, and *Asian American Poetry: The Next Generation*. In 2003 she was the resident poet at the Frost Place in Franconia, New Hampshire. New poems are published or forthcoming in *Poet Lore*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Crab Orchard Review*.

Asian Driver: The Sestina

It's an expression you're not supposed to use, like "black basketball player" or "fat person," unless you are a member of the group, in which case you can even tell jokes. Did you hear about the Asian driver who stopped at the red light?

Actually, no one should use the phrase lightly. Head for the road after using it, and you'll probably be hit by an Asian driver. It's plain hubris, unless you are a person of Asian descent, in which case the joke, in spite of being on your I-group,

might get you blamed, thanks to group affiliation, regardless of who ran the light; such is the power of the joke. Most of my life, I never heard anyone use the expression, but I am only the person I am. Remarks about Asian drivers

probably stopped when I, possibly a driver and certainly Asian, joined the group. For years I believed that every person would be judged on the heeding of lights and signposts, that racial profiling was used solely in the hot pursuit of thieves. Jokes

were trivial. Besides, the only jokes I'd ever heard concerning drivers were the criticisms men and women used against each other (women, as a group, were said to slam on brakes at yellow lights; men sped up; both would harm the person

in the crosswalk). Later, I became a person who wrote textbooks. The boss banned jokes about stupid people, Asian drivers, etc. A light went on: "Asian" was a kind of driver! When I parallel-parked badly, it had group repercussions, same as when I played piano or used

a calculator. Little use in trying to be a person, then, and not a group. Now I try to think of jokes when I'm in the driver's seat, waiting at a light.

The Donner Party

I imagine them lounging
in the late October sun, languid
on a warm afternoon,
with Donner himself,
hat pulled over his eyes,
asleep in the grass,
and Mrs. Reed seated on a boulder
beside him, mending the rip
in her daughter's blouse;

I picture the Breen children
wading at the edge of the Truckee,
and the guides dozing
beneath the whirr of cicadas invisible
in the Ponderosas behind them,

all of them satisfied and rested,
perhaps, for the first time in months,
confident in the slant of light,
now that Stanton
has returned with supplies,

that the push to the summit will be done,
that the following days will lead
down to the San Joaquin;

and I think of them
in that moment convinced,
after stopping five days,
that despite death and delusion
and one mistake after another

after another, that somehow
salvation still remained possible,
and success so close,
a certainty under a clear, predictable
autumn sky.

George Lober is the winner of the 1996 Ruth Cable Memorial Prize for Poetry sponsored by *Eclectic Literary Forum*. His poems have appeared in *Spectrum*, *Sage*, *The MPC Journal*, *Eclectic Literary Forum*, *Quarry West*, *Homestead Review*, *The Central California Poetry Journal*, and *The Anthology of Monterey Bay Poets 2004*. He is the author of **Shift of Light** (Hummingbird Press, Santa Cruz, CA, 2002). He lives in Carmel, California.

George Lober

The Day You Died Was a Beautiful Day

for my father

The day you died was a beautiful day:
by noon the sky had cleared to a calm, deep blue;
a breeze like warm breath lifted off the bay
and moved over the campus where a few
of my students sat laughing together,
on the lawn in front of class—grateful, no doubt,
for the sudden arrival of beach weather
and the few extra minutes to hang out
before I prepped them on their final exam.

That day I brought a cell phone into class,
recognizing, if nothing else, I am
your son, and if the call came in at last,
you'd prefer I do what I'd been paid to do.

I finished their prep, said nothing of you.

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George Lober

Methuselah Knew Scott T. Summers

*And all the days of Methuselah
were nine hundred and sixty nine years,
and he died.*

Genesis 5:27

Methuselah knew how to build a good fire,
how to scrape the scales
off a trout without bruising its flesh,
and to rise as the sun spilt
over eastern hills
because dawn was the best time
to grapple with the grief of dead sons.

Methuselah avoided stepping on ants,
understood the worth of a thick beard.
His memory pocketed friends
like specks of jasper and gypsum.
He polished them at twilight
recalling the strength of their handshakes,
the slant of their smiles.

He knew to sit patiently on tree stumps
amidst the birch and sycamores,
to munch on almonds and peer
through the wood waiting
for tomorrow to cover him like moss.

Slow and silent.
Lost to the world.
At ease with his ghosts.

Perhaps tonight, I'll take off my shoes,
let the backyard grass seal
the gaps between my toes,
hum a song I've never heard,
and toss acorns at the moon.

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Scott T. Summers is a teacher of English at Wayne Hills High School in Wayne, NJ. His poems have been published in *Mars Hill Review*, *Poet's Canvas*, *Pedestal Magazine*, and other print and electronic outlets. "Methuselah Knew" is the title poem of Scott's MFA thesis which he recently earned at William Paterson University. Scott hopes to publish his thesis as a chapbook. He lives in Northern NJ with his wife Laura and their children, Reanna and Garrett.

Tammy Turner-Peaden

A Taste Of Summer

It was summer
when I first tasted a girl-

and I can't stop remembering
bare feet on asphalt, hot;
sweat popping above our lips

as we walked through empty lots,
past houses that watched behind
pulled blinds and barking dogs,
beyond the school where the next year
we would not know ourselves.

You look like a boy, she said
(her daddy wouldn't let her out with boys)
and the smile that tilted her face
tugged all my muscles at once

I can't forget a junked Dodge
half-buried in the woods off Cypress street,
its inside smelling of burnt oil and smoke

and how she felt like wet suede stretched
across the seat; whispers salt-glazed-

our mouths like wind on open wounds.

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Tammy Turner-Peaden



Tammy Turner-Peaden, is a Paramedic from Tarboro, NC. Her poetry has been published in *Verse Libre*, *Reconnetaire Magazine*, *Spitfire poetics*, *Beginnings Magazine*, *Actio Poetry* among others. She lives alone with two cats and several rifles.

Douglas Goetsch

RIDING IN THE BUICK

Riding in the Buick with my father,
I used to pick out an approaching tree
and put myself in its place, standing there
with telephone wires cutting through my neck,
a hip sawed off because I leaned too far
into the road. I would curse my fate:
why couldn't my seed have landed on
the Appalachian trail, or in a rainforest
instead of here, where the only thing
to feel is the breeze of passing cars,
my branches swaying in a hundred shoulders,
a thousand hands waving on my wrists,
and as my father drove into the distance
I bid my shrinking self goodbye.

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Douglas Goetsch



Douglas Goetsch's poetry collections include *The Job Of Being Everybody*, winner of the Cleveland State University Poetry Center Open Competition, *Nobody's Hell* (Hanging Loose Press) and three prizewinning chapbooks. He lives in New York City, teaches creative writing to incarcerated teens at Passages Academy, and is founding editor of *Jane Street Press* (www.janestreet.com).

EASTER, HAMPTON BAYS

The surprise of a hard boiled egg
in a shoe, a lamp — something pagan
about it that fit our family
which had no slant on holidays,
just plastic grass and ad hoc
moves Mom made on poor
shy Dad, dangling mistletoe
over him wherever he walked,
Grandpa, on the east end
of Long Island, forever hanging
tinsel, one by one, a tree so perfect
it was sad, sad that a man's pride
came down to this, and Grandma,
soon to leave him, patting his head
saying, *Good boy, Freddy*. Now
it was Easter, time for a drive out there,
time to see cousin Kim and which
way she was wearing her hair,
and how long it would take her
to take off her clothes. The aunts
a year more wrinkled, still with good
legs, in cigarette fog discussing
Nixon and insurance and silicone,
Grandpa holding forth on something
boring like motor oil, his sons
nodding dutifully, as the dunes
advanced glacially on the house.

A History of Rivers

I don't remember her name
the one who died
or the man who saw a girl chase a leaf
into the current
and followed her

this is how a girl drowns a man
her ropy arms clasp his neck
she drags him down

these are disappearances
Georgia's body found in a field of dry grass
at the end of July
the hit and run boy
we planted a plum tree for in the fifth grade

this is how we marked time
body by body

a river moves
that is its nature
its method

it's nothing personal
finding yourself in that river
is a ghost act
and almost always your own fault

from far away the river shines in a brown line
across the landscape
but if you take it into your hands
the water is clear

it is autumn
and the trees have begun to lose
their leaves
the girl, blue-lipped
all the color drawn from
her skin, floats there
in a still pocket

I did not see her dead
honest
I saw her alive
she was watching cartoons that afternoon
lying on the shag carpet
propped up on her elbows
eating a government surplus cheese sandwich
a can of coke cupped between her small hands

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Marina Wilson is from northern California, where she attended the University of California at Berkeley and worked closely with late poet and activist, June Jordan. Her work has been published in *The Berkeley Fiction Review*, *Crowd Magazine*, and the online magazine *La Petite Zine*. She currently lives in New York City where she earned an MFA from New School University in 2002. She dedicates herself to writing and to teaching poetry in underserved communities throughout the New York City area. The poems in this issue are from a series of poems loosely connected to the Russian River in northern California.

HOME

there were freeways between us
lines of lights between us
rivers of traffic and rivers of rails
and then just the river between us
dry yellow fields and pastures between us
fields cut into neat agricultural squares
barbed wire and wood posts between us
there were rows of stakes and vines and insecticide between us
people stooped over the rows upon rows of vines
and their rough dry hands and the sun beating down on them
sweat and dust buried in their skin

and when the rain came
there was run off, silt streaming into the waters
poison between us
in the air and in the ground and in the water between us
and the gravel roads winding
through the fields and past the river
to the open face of this continent of our splintered existence
there were dark birds circling in the pockets of air between us
there were words thrown against the wind burnt cliffs
and also words we could not speak

until all we were left with was this word
between, between, between
of the words meant to connect one thing to another
of the words meant to explain what things
what people are
to each other
how one object relates to another
we chose the word between
and held it like a blade
and it made us feel brave, it made us feel solitary
and therefore strong
and therefore safe

Marina Wilson



Photo credit: Paul Godwin
www.paulgodwin.com

Jim Fowler

Search for the Meaning of Life

He crawled over cracked crevices
and nicked his knees on gray
granite. Threadbare to the core,
he arrived at Annapurna.

The bodhisattva, brown and lotus
positioned, unmoved by mere human
need, stared at space, under the cap
of mountain and immortality.

"What is the meaning of life,
great guru of enlightenment?"
In a tongue I knew, he cackled,
"Life is but a fluffy cloud."

"You got to be kidding me! Life's a cloud?!"
"You mean it isn't?", he said surprised.

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Jim Fowler



Resides outside of Boston, with four grown kids, six grandkids. His wife owns and runs a flower shop 100 miles away, which gives him time for poetry during the week. The kids professionally examine his legal affairs, his prostate, and his nutrition. All this is fodder for his muse, who came into his life six years ago. Since then, he's been published in print and on-line. In his spare time, he's a managing partner of a medical instrumentation company.

Patrice Vecchione

Outside The Market

A woman's plaintive voice,
in the near-empty parking lot,
early evening, *There you are;*
There you are.

A child gone missing from Kmart?
Or a long lost lover returned out of nowhere?
I imagine red hair a-flurry, a quick,
forward step in high heels.

And again, *There you are,*
the syllables long, the ache in her voice
enough, even with my own hurry,
arms full of groceries
and my upright upbringing,
to turn me around:

a small flock of gulls,
their yellow beaks wide.

Poem © Patrice Vecchione 2005. All rights reserved.

Patrice Vecchione



Patrice Vecchione is the author of **Writing and the Spiritual Life: Finding Your Voice by Looking Within** (McGraw-Hill) and the book of poems **Territory of Wind**. Her poetry anthologies include, **Truth and Lies** (Henry Holt), **Whisper and Shout** (Cricket Books) and most recently, **Revenge and Forgiveness** (Henry Holt).

Here & Then

April Ossmann

How strange, to be in two
places at once, or in two times. This
Cambridge Sunday afternoon, *that's*
me, he says—here, sitting with his
tailbone hanging off the couch's
edge, friends and Sunday paper
spread around the living room,

and there, on radio, playing
bass guitar—no three places—
somewhere, *live*, on stage, recording
the song for radio broadcast—
four—his mind remembering
how he felt that day, the place
he played, so he's none

of those places, really, nor here
now, either. And me—I'm five,
giggles rising in the Santa Barbara
air like soap bubbles—my
uncles tickling me—
delight so lucid
I can return to it anytime without

going anywhere—I think. And I
am thirty-two in the summer of '92,
paddling a friend's canoe across
a Vermont pond at dusk.
And you? Are you where your body,
or your mind is, and is this
the reason for our obsession

with our location in space and time?
Some fear we're floating aimlessly
through a fathomless, and therefore,
fearsome universe, or worse, circling
the same memories the way this dog
turns several times around
before lying down at last, to sleep?

Poem © April Ossmann 2005. All rights reserved.



{Featured Artist Frederic Mantos}

April Ossmann



April Ossmann has published her poetry in numerous journals including *Harvard Review* and *Colorado Review*, and in the anthologies *Contemporary Poetry of New England*, and *The Maine Poets: An Anthology of Verse*. She won the Prairie Schooner Readers' Choice Award for ten poems published in the Summer 2000 issue. She is Director of Alice James Books, and has taught creative writing and literature courses at Lebanon College and at the University of Maine at Farmington.

Remembering



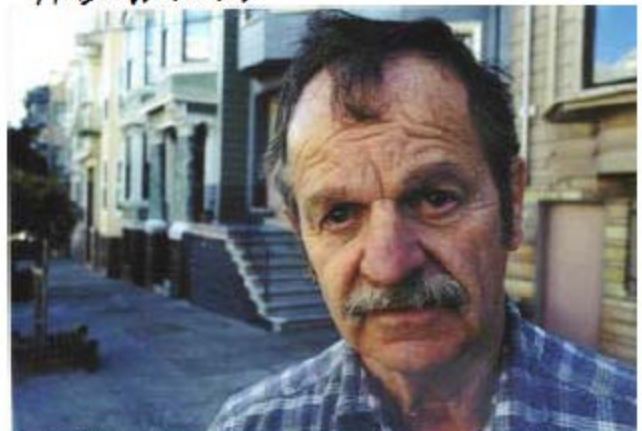
{Featured Artist Frederic Mantor}

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A.D. Winans

I remember how I used
to get into the movies
for twenty-five cents
back when I was twelve
and lived in the Haight Ashbury
long before the Summer of Love
while down on Market Street
they played hi-lo on stage
twice a week and spun the
wheel of fortune calling out the
lucky winner as a busty female usher
ran up the isle yelling:
1, 2, 3, 4 silver dollars
in the balcony
her breasts bouncing with the
dropping of each silver dollar
only fading memories now
like trolley car tokens
like Fleer's double bubble gum
Playland at the Beach
and Sutro's Hot Baths
fragments out of reach
like an aging gypsy woman
reading tea leaves
and finding a death note
in the hands of a sightless conductor
found lifeless three blocks short
of the end of the line

A.D. Winans



A. D. Winans is a native San Francisco poet and the former editor and publisher of *Second Coming Magazine/Press*. He is the author of over forty chapbooks and books of poetry and prose, including *The Holy Grail: The Charles Bukowski Second Coming Revolution*. His work has appeared internationally, and has been translated into eight languages. Most Recent book, *Whitman's Lost Children*, 24th Street Irregular Press. A book of his selected poems

The End of the Line

She listens distraughtly.

The engine has stopped.
The pistons of white clapboard and
lavender azaleas are stilled.
No longer does the axle of paychecks
revolve to put each small day
a little further along than the one before.
The reliably Middle-American wheels sit idly
upon a given . . . a well-paved, well-marked
given . . . suddenly become a taken-away.
They had been promised (yes, she was sure
there was a promise) a destination
where the laws of self break down
and one plus one equals more than just two.
Something else broke down instead,
something intimately yet inaccessibly inside her.
She listens for the sound of the engine
but can hear only the still-echoing
bang when a billion-year-long
line of motherhood, a stay wire anchored
in the primordial lode, snapped with
the doctor's judiciously chosen words . . .

. . . infertile . . . nothing we can do . . .

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Robert Kendall



{ Featured Artist Frederic Mantor }

Charles Levenstein

Aria

There are times when yearning subsides, a moment
in the morning with only twittering birds for company,
the sun is young and a slight breeze ripples Egyptian grass.
Stillness is a pool in which to swim, air brushes
arm and forehead with the long hair of a dancer.

Or times when small bouquets of roses adorn each room,
tea roses, yellow roses, red roses hard as fingernail polish,
parchment white roses, velvet and silk roses, roses weary
after love, the hour not relevant, thick cotton sheets aside,
the day not counted, Tuesday or Sunday, no matter, anytime.

This is not about completion: the rent heart is not at issue,
the imagined sister is not missing. Once at a concert
in a palace in Gratz, bewildered by the exquisite lights,
I dreamed a life devoted to beauty.

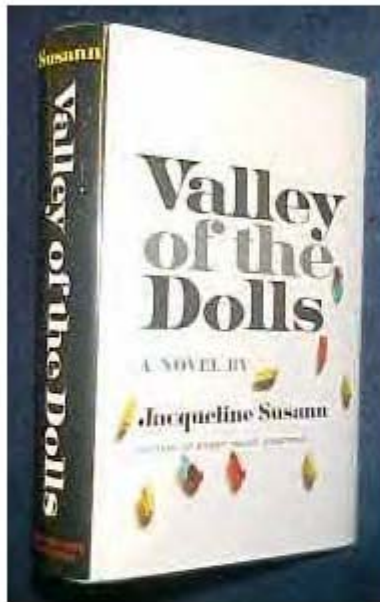
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The Big Valley

David Trinidad

(This talk was presented at "The Other Jackie," a multimedia presentation and panel discussion of the enduring influence of Jacqueline Susann on the occasion of the reissuing of *Valley of the Dolls*, at The New School, October 21, 1997. Other panelists were Rona Jaffe, Michael Korda, Esther Margolis, Rex Reed, and Barbara Seaman. Ira Silverberg was the moderator.)



I grew up in the suburbs of Los Angeles, in the city of Chatsworth, and it was there, in another well-known valley—the San Fernando—that I first encountered *Valley of the Dolls*. It was July of 1967, and I had just turned fourteen. Introverted and troubled (particularly by the secret of my homosexuality), my view of reality had been shaped, for the most part, by books, movies, and television shows. I didn't care for newspapers—they were too real. I spent much of my time—especially during the summer months—at the magazine stand in the local Thrifty Drug Store. It was there that I'd found my treasured comics and movie magazines and, in the book rack right next to it, my equally treasured paperbacks—*Up the Down Staircase*, Ray Bradbury stories, Agatha Christie mysteries,

novelizations of films like *Arrivederci, Baby!*

I distinctly remember how *Valley of the Dolls* jumped out at me. I'm sure it was the word "Dolls"—rather than the red, blue and yellow-and-green pills strewn across the cover—that immediately captivated me. Barbie, a different kind of doll, had long been an obsession. And when I read the jacket copy and learned that the novel was about "the secret, drug-filled, love-starved, sex-satiated, nightmare world of show business," I had to buy it.

I brought the book home and began devouring it. I was enrolled in a junior high summer English class; I naively asked the teacher if I could do my required book report on *Valley of the Dolls*. The next day she gave me her stern answer: "Absolutely not!" I ended up doing my report on *Oliver Twist*—also a good story, but no *Valley of the Dolls*.

When my mother noticed I was reading *Valley of the Dolls*, she had a fit and took it away from me. She'd already heard about this "dirty" book. I was now officially

forbidden to read it. She read it instead, then passed it on to one of her friends.

I saved my nickels and dimes (a dollar twenty-five—the price of the book—was a lot of money) then rode my bicycle back to Thrifty Drug and bought myself another copy. This time I hid it under my mattress and read it on the sly.

While my mother thought I was upstairs doing homework, I was lost in a "world where sex is a success weapon, where love is the smiling mask of hate, where slipping youth and fading beauty are ever-present specters [. . .] a world where the magic tickets to peace or oblivion are 'dolls' [. . .] pep pills, sleeping pills, red pills, blue pills . . ." I forfeited reruns of *Gilligan's Island* and *Bewitched*, left the dinner table early, even read by flashlight under the covers at night. When I got to the last page, I was overcome by an acute sense of sadness. I couldn't bear that the story was over; I wanted it to go on and on. I immediately started reading the book again. I must have read it four or five times by the end of that summer.

My obsession with the book quite naturally led to an obsession with the movie of *Valley of the Dolls*, which came out later that year. The three stars of the film—Barbara Parkins, Patty Duke and Sharon Tate—appeared on the cover of *Look* magazine, lounging on a big pink bed. I began buying every movie magazine with pictures from the movie, which I cut out and taped into a special *Valley of the Dolls* scrapbook. I added advertisements and reviews from newspapers, and made little plastic captions with my label maker, affixing them beneath the photos: "BARBARA PARKINS AS ANNE WELLS," "SHARON TATE AS JENNIFER NORTH," and so on. I put "OSCAR WINNER PATTY DUKE" under a picture of Patty, tears streaming down her face, clutching at a huge jar of red "dolls." I even made one that said "COSTUMES DESIGNED BY TRAVILLA" for a picture of Barbara Parkins in a filmy Gillian Girl gown. My *Valley of the Dolls* scrapbook got thrown out in the 70s; I wish I still had it today.



The movie opened at Grauman's Chinese Theater. I begged my mother to take me to see it. She finally gave in and an outing was arranged: me and five women driving from the Valley to Hollywood in a beige, wood-paneled station wagon to see the "sensational, much talked about" hit film that was "for mature audiences only."

I was mesmerized by the movie, took it all quite seriously—which shows how mature I really was. (It wasn't until the mid-80s, when I saw the film after almost twenty years, that I realized how wonderfully horrible it is.) I remember calling a radio talk show shortly after seeing the film that first time. The commentator had put down Patty Duke's performance; I indignantly defended her, saying she deserved to win a second Oscar for her dramatic portrayal of Neely O'Hara. I also remember reenacting the famous wig scene with my best friend Mark. We used his mother's curly brunette wig and recited the lines verbatim: "They drummed you right out of Hollywood. So you come crawling back to Broadway. Well, Broadway doesn't go for booze and dope." I wonder what became of my friend Mark.



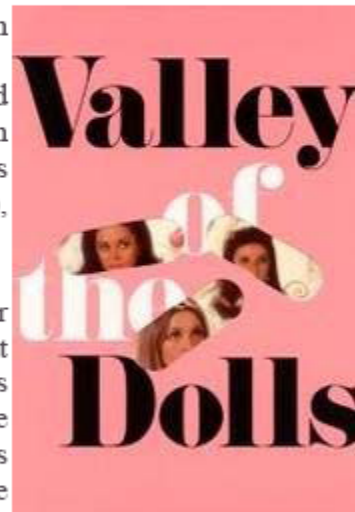
My obsession with *Valley of the Dolls* came full circle in August of 1969, with the senseless murder of Sharon Tate and four others on Cielo Drive. The shock of those murders was intensified because of my fascination with *Valley of the Dolls*. Hadn't I clipped numerous photos of Sharon Tate and taped them in my *Valley of the Dolls* scrapbook? Hadn't I punched her name on my handy label maker? I stopped running to the magazine stand at Thrifty's; instead, I waited for the daily paper for news of the murders. This wasn't some clever Agatha Christie puzzle. Reality had come closer than I ever wanted it to.

It came even closer a few months later when it was revealed that the murderers had lived at the Spahn Movie Ranch in Chatsworth, just a few miles from our home. I'd never been to the ranch, but as a child had climbed the rocks at nearby Stony Point.

I was thrown into confusion and panic. How was I to live in this real world? This world where kids just a few years older than me mercilessly stabbed a beautiful blonde eight-and-a-half-month-pregnant actress to death in her own home. Only two years had passed since I spotted *Valley of the Dolls* in the revolving paperback rack at Thrifty Drug. But Jacqueline Susann's "nightmare world of show business" now seemed like a fairy tale from my distant childhood.

As happy as I am that *Valley of the Dolls* is back in print, I wasn't sure I'd be able to read the new pink edition. I didn't want to be unfaithful to the white, pill-splattered Bantam paperback that I cherished in my youth. But when I saw the brand new version with its fresh white pages (compared to the yellowing pages of my poor old Bantam), I couldn't resist.

Although the book is no longer a delirious escape for me, it's still a damn good read. The same themes that enticed me as a teenager still pull me right along—Anne's obsession with Lyon, the Broadway back-stabbing and the Hollywood decadence, Neely's self-destruction, Jennifer's futile attempt at happiness. In much of the press that the book's re-release has received, it's still referred to as "trash" or "mindless fluff." This amazes me. It's pointless to debate the book's literary merit. In defense of her own writing, Susann once said, "Way back then they didn't think Shakespeare was a good writer. He was the soap opera king of his day." But I will say I don't think any text (except possibly *Breakfast at Tiffany's*) has given me as much pleasure as *Valley of the Dolls*. It has a certain magic that sets it apart from other novels.



Part of that magic comes from the intimate way Susann constructed her characters. On the surface they resemble real life celebrities (Grace Kelly, Judy Garland, Marilyn Monroe), but underneath they're pure Susann. They house her most private feelings and desires. She's there in Lyon's ambition to become a respected novelist, in Anne's craving for the excitement of New York and her ambivalence toward her mother's New England stiffness, in Jennifer's fear of aging and her confrontation with breast cancer. Susann's love for her husband Irving Mansfield is evident in Anne's devotion to Lyon, and her respect for his business savvy can be found in the character of Henry Bellamy.

There's also magic in the plot; it's a beautifully structured novel. Over a period of twenty years, with numerous subplots and tangents, Susann maintains an elegant narrative intricacy. Nothing seems extraneous; it's all part of her elaborate masterplan. She's a swift, expert storyteller.

Susann's vision of life—in all of her novels—is bleak. In *Valley*, none of the characters are spared—Jennifer commits suicide to avoid a mastectomy, Neely becomes a monster, Anne settles for an adulterous husband and pill addiction. Susann's women are punished for simply wanting to be loved. Beautiful young women have some power—but it's get what you can before the clock ticks your looks away. Talented women can have a career—but forget personal fulfillment. It's a pretty harsh world—for "mindless fluff."



Broadway battle-ax Helen Lawson is the most maligned character in *Valley of the Dolls*. Her Fellini-esque grotesqueness is depicted in lovingly brutal detail. This is Jackie's revenge on ex-friend Ethel Merman, and she pulls out all the stops. Lawson is described as "rough, tough, unfeeling, coarse and rotten," as an "old war horse," "a bull in heat," "an old cow," an "old bag" (twice), "Old Ironsides," "a big brassy bore," "a bloated, loud-mouthed broad," "a rat," and an "old bald eagle."

Lawson is also given the most vulgar lines in the novel. Referring to Henry's fading sex drive, she says, "I guess it's not easy to put starch in his lob." About Gino she says, "There's nothing like a wop in the kip." And arguing with her director, she utters, "And what should an ingenue look like? A fucked-out redhead with big tits?"

Elsewhere Susann is equally over the top. When an overweight Neely emerges from the sanitarium, she's referred to as "fat as a pig," as "a greasy pig," a "cow," "a pig," "a fat slob," a "fat little pig," a "bag of blubber," and a "pig of a star"—all in just twelve pages.

From our vantage point, it seems almost impossible that the sex scenes in *Valley of the Dolls* were once considered "shocking" or "dirty." They either seem tame or, in the scenes where Tony and the senator slobber all over Jennifer's breasts, a bit ridiculous. The pill-taking seems more sensual than the lovemaking. When Anne loses her virginity to Lyon, the writing is florid. But when Jennifer takes a Seconal for the first time, we get Susann at her most poetic:

Should she try one? It was a frightening idea, that a little red capsule as tiny as this could put you to sleep. She walked to the small pantry and poured a glass of water. She held the pill for a second, feeling her heart pound. This was dope—but that was ridiculous [. . .] one pill couldn't hurt. She swallowed it, replaced the bottle in her bag and rushed into bed.

How long would it take? She still felt wide awake. She could hear [. . .] the clock on the night table ticking, the traffic sounds outside—in fact, everything seemed intensified . . .

Then she felt it! Oh, God! It was glorious! Her whole body felt weightless . . . her head was heavy, yet light as air. She was going to sleep . . . sleep . . . oh, the beautiful little red doll . . .

"Tiny, bullet-shaped red capsules," "gorgeous red dolls," "gleaming red capsules," "lovely red dolls," "faithful little red dolls"—Susann's dolls provide "the most beautiful feeling in the world." "Oh, God!" Jennifer exclaims again as "the soft numbness [begins] to slither through her body." Neely sips her Scotch and waits for "the real reaction, the anesthetic feeling that would seep through her whole body and drag her down into sleep." And when she gets Demerol shots in Spain, Neely experiences a feeling of "silken happiness."



With her mammoth black wigs and her gold ankhs and her Pucci outfits (Rex Reed called them her "banana-split nightmares") and her private *Love Machine* jet, Susann epitomized the author as star. She made writing look glamorous and fun. For most of us, it is far from that. And unlike her characters, who are disappointed once they reach the top of Mount Everest, Susann seemed to thoroughly enjoy her success.

* * *

A few weeks ago as I reread *Valley of the Dolls*, I kept stopping at each reference—and they are numerous—to "fags" and "faggots" and "queers." I wondered how these references must have struck me as a closeted fourteen-year-old. Homophobic peer pressure was at its worst in junior high. "Fag" and "faggot" and "queer" were the very words I lived in daily terror of. Yet there, on page ten of *Valley of the Dolls*, was "a fag singer"; a few pages later "a fag dancer" appeared. I counted almost thirty such references throughout the book. At fourteen, I must have marveled at each one. And they must have offered me immense hope.

The message from "real" literature was ever grim: Tennessee Williams' homosexuals died sad pathetic deaths; and with Truman Capote, I had to read between the lines. But Susann's fags and faggots and queers sang and danced and directed plays, designed costumes, escorted aging Broadway actresses to openings. They may have been stereotypes, but they actually functioned in the world. And more importantly, they had sex with each other: "Dickie is having a ball with all those chorus boys—it's like smorgasbord."

No wonder my gratitude to Jacqueline Susann refuses to wane.

The Woman Who Gave Birth To Stones

Gwendolyn Mintz

The village fell to sleep beneath a moonless sky. The woman lay in the open field near her house, her skirts bunched around her waist. In the distance she could hear the toll of the bells from the church. She did not know the exact hour, but each dong, dong reminded her that time was passing though she no longer knew how many hours . . . three, four . . .

She breathed deep and anxious, groaned as another pain jolted through her. She yearned to press her naked legs together but knew that doing so would not serve her. Turning, she moved onto her side, her head resting on her outstretched arm. As the pains continued, increased, she clawed at the ground, the dirt sifting through her clenched fist.

She breathed and then again, until all echoed pain. Turning again onto her back, she howled with the wind rising and then finally, now finally.

Summoning strength, she rose until she sat, reached between her legs.

There was no sound only blood, which she wiped away with her apron. There was no breath only her tears, which watered the wildflowers, sure to bloom tomorrow in memory. And the wind -

A steady breeze rocked her as she sat with it there in her lap. Then the wind became cruel, teased from her mouth the name Gabriel and carried it away.

The bells again; her husband's voice called to her in its sound.

She swiped at her cheeks. She looked down and gently folded the arms and legs under, tucked the head beneath. She took the ends of her apron so it was cradled as she rose.

Tomorrow, again, they would go to the priest and when it was time, she would lie with her husband, one hand clutching the dark hair at his nape, the other across the pillow, clutching the necklace, fingers entwined in beads.

In the distance, the flame of her husband's face flickered in the window.

At the edge of the path, she knelt, reached into her lap, setting the stone in place behind the last and the others before. She pressed the tips of her fingers to her lips, smoothed her hand along the skin still soft, though it would stiffen like them all now under her feet as she made her way to the door. Not one beneath her steps ever uttering a sound.

Gwendolyn Mintz

Gwendolyn Mintz is a fiction writer and poet. Her work has appeared in various online and print journals as well as four anthologies. Mintz lives with her children, turtles, cats and a dog in New Mexico. When she isn't writing, she designs teddy bears, reads and performs comedy. She is a former news writer and college instructor, but now writes creatively full-time.



Rhode Island notebook 5.11.03-5.14.03

[anabasis]

May 11, 2003 1:57 pm CST curb
at Kreizer. Set odo. Miles on car:
53,713. Overcast. High wind advisory
upon Illinois. I am traveling to Providence
to read at Rhode Island School of
Design. Mairead invited me, and even
though she told me in March she'd like
to divorce me, she still wants me to keep
the commitment I made to read, at her
invitation last fall, at RISD. So I am sitting
at the curb outside my apt and
keeping my commitment and am not
happy about seeing her: I love her but
feel very jerked around. The great
blue dome of Illinois
is today tossing & fretting &
Gray God bless Abraham
Lincoln. West on Grove. Twigs
& leaf bundles & 4 foot branches
drag on the crowned road.
A neighbor's America FLAG raging
& hopefully ripping. The dark
violet mulberries are limber
Oakland & Clinton 2:02 pm the oaks
jostling. Strong West Wind as I rise
onto Highway 74 east at 2:10 pm
fulgent tail wind, the wind is like
clear wild goat hair: cheese sandwich &
pickle. O little black cows to the
right near Le Roy Illinois are
you getting fat under the gray
and galloping sky

Cow stench. One would think
cow stench too heavy even for
wind this stiff. Why is not their butt
stench dissipated by the stirred air?
I should imagine some other

Gabriel Gudding

smells get snagged in the ditches.
Cow smell is that of its derriere --
dairy air indeed.
Origin of the Kaskasia River 44.6 m
Ditch grass hairy and grass and
waving, flax blue & flex-ible & brilliant &
a ditch under A bridge near
Champaign is shiftingly green. Traffic brilliant &
Dutch.
Those gray green Russian olive bushes
look under water in the wind.

Salt Fork. Vermilion County Illinois: 66 m
from Normal!
Middle Fork Vermilion River 77 m
and 3 Canada Geese in dell water near
Kenekuk Co. Park
In my imagination as I drive I
spit my way into an Hemingway
story, "aw shucks, aw shucks I
am a man, a laconic mascu-line."
Salt Fork Vermilion River.
Indiana State Line 88 m from Normal
Wabash River 95 m on a pole a 10 foot by
15 foot American flag rippling
stiffly, then stops, rises up like a
horse on its back legs and comes
down in another direction and
gallops its ripples to the southeast
Aubergine colored Ford
pickup truck passes me, Indiana
plates, its windows tinted, in
white big letters on back window

A 2' x 2' window decal
 that says " 'NUKE' FRANCE"
 and I become depressed. Are
 people – yes – that
 ragingly slackjawed stupid? 120 m:
 wind more from the south now.
 Vast brown and sometimes gray Silver
 puddles from rains on the fields
 158 m East Creek Reservoir DAM
 flumes are open, to release the
 pent up rain water.
 160 M ¼ tank gone.
 70 e 167 m 4:35 pm
 I now begin the traverse of
 Indianapolis upon the elevated
 highways of it, I-465 to I-70. At 4:37 pm
 while upon the stilts of Hwy 70 I see
 the city ctr oz-like under blue dome —
 gray bumps of girder buildings.
 Those Oz-like gritty crumbs: the buildings
 of Indy are tall crumbs
 I pass beyond the city of
 Indiana, the city of depressing Indiana,

Indiana land of modern day KKK. Indiana,
 land of the Flatrock
 river which is 220m from Normal, Illinois, Indiana of Tan
 plowed fields. Indiana of slight green fuzz in some, and
 brown water in others.
 Whitewater River of Indiana, 230miles, is brown
 tumid mud banks, cut w/ flood
 cuts fat w/ mud, three cows next to a
 sign that reads Dayton 62 m. Oh, Ohio! I'm
 coming! at 242 M from Normal I begin to see
 the poisonous signs of eastern Indiana, the
 TOM RAPER RV
 signs. At 248 M "SAVE TODAY TOM
 RAPER'S WAY." O, Hio State Line (250 m
 from Normal) I so love seeing your great cervical
 arch cloaking our woods and hexing the personnel of Indiana
 5:48 pm. Wind direct behind me since
 leaving Normal.
 I cross the Great Miami River, Swollen,
 booby-like 284 m. The rains have swollen
 all the rivers: the day is the color of a can.

The Mad River at 292 M is not shabby
 The birch trees and cottonwoods
 near it
 Are red in their green, a smock green,
 Kelly green, a bottle green.
 Wind now from WNW 38m w
 of Columbus.
 6:49 pm CST I switch on
 lights. Just finished listening to
 The Reader by Bernard Schlink, trans-
 lated by Carol Brown Janeway
 Rain specks 325 m for ½ tank gone
 54.62 mpg — 13 mpg over hwy
 average: 54 miles per gallon is
 unprecedented! due to tailwind!
 270 N 342 m 8:10 pm EST
 Getting dark

8:15 pm STOP for food & coffee
 360 m 71 N

Your oddball cherry-cobbler neck,
 O Nancy Reagan, does not
 disturb nor bother me this slackjaw nation
 even though you are still skinny, O
 head of Alien on boney shouldered woman

You ruined and ruled this nation
with your bobble headed husband

erection north of Columbus. I always
seem to be visited by an erection
north of Columbus Ohio. WHY?

Rain begins, erection leaves

Cold today: 40s & 50s F
I make I-76 east 450miles fr Normal at 10:10pm

Driving in the nightlight: I be an
Ambassador who don't
wear no polyester. The hickey
on my shoulder done flown down
from Freyja's mouth (on her sucking
head)
Get camping stuff, get movies,
Get ink.

You know, when you get a lot of
flies in A room & they're big
& kinda clumsy, like fatted
flippy buttons, they sound
somewhat electrical.

Meander Reservoir 510.5 m
STOP TO GAS in Niles, Ohio 512.9
I drove 512 miles on one tank of gas
514.8 m 9.995g = 51.51 mpg

Pennsylvania Welcomes You 527 m
O Shenango River, How many
FBI Agents have driven over you tod
Fitty witnesses run across the
road. runnin at duh judge
saying I saw him, I saw the bad
praysident run dissa way
I have issues w/ ill-bred women
Highest Pt on 80 east of MS 637 m
My rt ear pops. 1:12 AM
I hear
that from the burlap of myth
a swale of words comes out
of a verbal ditch

At 1:20am in the dark mts of
velvet Pennsylvania I imagine my
self accosted by the floating head
of Nancy Reagan: her great ringed eyes
her raccoon-like anger. AHHHH:
What kind of mad Kabuki are
you into now, Lady. That
disturbing

thing you're wearing
that stuff you're shouting.
671 m REST STOP PEE. NEED REST.
1:46 am BACK ON ROAD ANYWAY

3:10am 766m Susquehanna River
81 N 784m 3:28am
½ tank Gone 287m
FOG hwy 84east near Forks Bridge Rd.

4:35am a luminous purple to the
North – dawn at Dingman Township
856m
It is Monday fucking morning I
have driven all night I
am tired. I am bones. More fog again
Welcome to New York 873.8 miles
After & over some bridge. Port Jervis.

Dawny Dawn Dawn. 5:10 AM

FOG – mild, diluted —visibility
150 yards Must get coffee
feel strapped to wheel
Heavy traffic since 4:30

5:30 AM Fill on Exxon 47.55 mpg

2 coffees & “gourmet” pound cake
& pack of “Starburst” “fruit chews”
pain in left knee
Hudson River, fog occluding
the hills

691 e 984 m 6:50AM
91 N 992 m 7 AM

Rest Area 994

[katabasis]

Depart Rest Area 11 AM

Mattabassett River 998 M

Exit 22-S Hwy 95

999.6 – 1000.1 m 11:03 AM

Chester Bowles Hwy

Foliage near Beaver Meadow Rd
near Haddam drier,

pricklier, sparer, trees skinny
& yellow green, almost autumnal,
lots of rocks

Casserina & Martin
Moving & Storage

860 347 8888

partly sunny

Anguilla Rd near No. Stonington CT
Pawcatuck

Mashuntucket Reservation

Welcome to Rhode Island

I believe I just saw A pig

dead rt shoulder 150 M

Exit 20, exit 1

At 1098 mile from Normal 12:32pm

I drive up hills into Providence up
up above the Wanasquatucket River up

into the brickly air,

into the ginkgo, the footpaths of shale, the
slate roofs of RISD, the dollhouse center

of Providence, the scent of

the Wanasquatucket like a rose above into leaden
rippled windows and long legs of

the walkers and into the little

hostel house where Mairead got me

a room because we are in disagreements

she asked for a divorce.

7:28am May 14 Eastern Standard Time I sit in my ECHO
above the Wanasquatucket and Set odometer

at Prospect & Angell. Make 95-S 7:33am

Bright sun east to left

A Wednesday morning—gave reading last night

in Carr House to crowd of RISD teachers students and
professor mairead byrne standing in red corduroys tall

against the door, leaning there and listening to me arms
crossed and with a not nice spression on her face.

89.7FM NPR President Putin

Powell in Russia. Wind in an American

flag shows a wind fr. west

Blue sky, whit high & pink clouds

32.5m I stop in W. Greenwich

for Dunkin Donuts X-Large

coffee w/ cream 2 old fashions

CT welcomes me with its signs

Park clouds. Up down. Hike!

hike! Bye Bye Ford. Rode & Red

SUV. St. Mary's Hospital

"Vanity that we parade around,
then bury." — Chris Whitcomb

Such are our bodies.

Housatonic River 139.4m

84 W still Connecticut

Amen Amen, parked clouds.

I do not think clouds ever

park. 10:04am EST 158m

NY Border then east branch

of Croton River. A river is

not illegal I hope the head of Nancy

Reagan does not haunt me this drive:

Fishkill Creek 183.5m

Hudson River Goddamnit

I repeat again, these clouds

seem parked to me.

Wallkill River 202.3m

10:44am EST Wind WNW

The dipshit stood in the grotto
 done w/ bitching. Something
 felt good there to him. Calm grotto
 Peaceful grotto. He had not been
 himself a bully. But he felt
 his own life was an old bully to
 him. His own life was an old bully.
 PA border 228m Matamoras PA
 STOP Milford, PA 11:15am
 236.3m fr Prov 437.2m in tank
 10.074g = 43.40 mpg
 Depart 11:24am – w/out peeing –
 got eyeful of old man fr. New Jersey
 on toilet in gas station, grossed me out,
 why old man leave door unlocked?
 His thighs pale muscled, his face-skin
 liver spotted and loosened from his head bones,
 the cheap baseball cap framing his shocked look.
 MY GOD: I SAW HIS THIGHS!

It must be a fine thing
 to be a radio: giving and giving
 racking up great blessings
 for that constancy and generosity.
 What a fine job, a radio in a car,
 little box of good
 in a great mobile box of curiosity.
 Sunny wind but gray dull clouds
 Western Pennsylvania in the afternoon
 has a light conducive to inducing headaches,
 I have noticed this
 Rest area 257m 11:43am
 on road 11:46am
 Rain dottles 12:01pm 273.8m
 Near 81-S interchange lots
 of construction, sun comes out
 briefly, goes away

big deer dead under bridge
 “Keep right on going, and
 nothing will happen.” – Richard Feynman

large dog or small deer
 80W 318m 12:43pm
 Big deer 327m

After seeing this deer I
 wonder if it wd be possible to kill
 A deer using only a thumbtack.
 How many times wd I have to
 stab the deer w/ the thumbtack in
 order to kill it.

Susquehanna River 336m

I believe that big deer was
 fr Princeton, probably an undergraduate
 who decided to undergo an experiment
 in which he ran out across
 Pennsylvania as a deer. Got himself hit.

O look, some
 birds, starlings maybe, poking
 the beaks into the tilled dark garden
 on rt in a home above the ditch
 Susquehanna River 366.3m
 1:25 pm. Seem like very little
 wind.

¼ tank gone 145m = 48.5mpg

Sun out but very cloudy
 1:41pm EST
 leaves here small, immature 386.7m
 Here are the big flat cliffs of tall
 height and fat and wide cliffs like
 the kind you would see at the sea! 395.5m

Having got 54mpg on the march
 up country a few days ago, it occurs to
 me that wind's more a factor than
 previous estimated. DUH. 2:31pm Sunny partly clouds
 witness crow walking to the
 rt of a torn up much decayed
 deer carcass on rt shoulder 441.1m
 with the intention of Eating its face parts?
 2:42pm very tired. Must get coffee
 2:48pm am at McDonald's Exit 120 Hwy 84

In my trunk are a dozen
 or so National Geographics
 dated 1940s. They were in the hostel
 at RISD on Prospect Street just
 being mounting by dust: much on war, much
 anti-Japanese racism, many fountain pen
 ads, Norwegian soldiers shown. 3:19 I stop
 to pee, reststop on rd again 3:23pm. Bright
 sun now. Ragged-topped cumulonimbi
 Wind at 500m looks
 to be from North 3-5mph
 Sun very bright now
 No A/C but vent ran on
 high. 3 or 4 vents of my Toyota Echo open all
 directed at my face. Sometimes
 the coming heat of spring is
 depressing to me.

½ tank gone 273m
45.88 mpg
Clarion River 515.3m
4:46pm I finish my coffee.
282m in tank I turn on
A/C this is a Rotring Core fountain pen
Crane dismantling a bridge
over hwy 80 west 525m
Alleghany River 531.5m
3:59pm EST
Shenango River 573m 4:35pm
575.6m Ohio border 4:37pm
Meander Reservoir 591.7m 4:52pm
5:05pm 607m Rest Stop pee
5:11pm on HWY

8.925 43.47 mpg – ¾ tank
gone
71 S 652 m 5:49pm
Cappy cappy.
675.4m Exit 186 71 S

STOP TO GAS
439 m in tank
6:12 pm
439.2m 9.553 45.98 mpg
6:17 on rd.
6:51 pm Frothy charcoal
clouds. Getting raincloud
darker 717m
lights on 7:09 PM

RAIN SPLATS 7-8 mm diameter
About 10-15/second at first.
Then about 20/second & 12-15mm
I don't use my wipes.
270 W 742m glorious
White pale yellow slantlights
similar to diluted milk
759m 70W 7:32 pm
Why do some people talk
about their teeth?

This road is not a bunch of
crappy shit.

Mad River 808.5m
Shirt sleeve weather
What if instead of one shorter distance
between things, there were two
shortest distances between things?
We wd have our choice of economies –
what a thought
Great Miami River
Powerful rain 8:30pm EST
Still light out and ¼ tank gone
143m traveled — rain —
grey-blue road, ungrabbable clouds

8:50pm EST Darker yet —
& hazing low after A certain
time in the day it gets
darker real fast
850m IN border 8:52pm
small drops of rain
Big Blue River 887.5 m
dark dark dark
9:35 EST
Far faint flashes of lightning
high in windshield above car
mirror as I approach Indianapolis 912m frequent
(1 per second)
but very high. Dark dark

10:10 EST At edge of Indianapolis
Approaching A Massive horseshoe
shaped lightning storm

am going into middle of horseshoe
with great blue-yellow and green
lightning veins to my right and left:
treetrunks of light
slapped out of heaven then gone

941m 74W
9:37 CST

horizon-breaking lightning stroke

270 ½ tank 45.38 mpg
9:50 CST out of T-storm
and west of Indy 956.9

10:10 Getting somewhat tired.
450m ¾ tank gone
44.82mpg

I notice a Bright nearly full tin-colored moon
top part of driver's side window
which I watch crost the cornstream of Illinois so tired
I in danger. Last night had chat with
Mike Magee, runner of Combo Press
11:53pm Exit HWY 74 at exit 135
traveled 1,097 miles, tired tired in the dark

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Gabriel Gudding



Gabriel Gudding's first book, **A Defense of Poetry**, won the Starrett prize by the University of Pittsburgh press and was published as part of their Pitt Poetry Series in November, 2002. His work appears in places like *New American Writing*, *Fence*, *Jacket*, *APR*, *CONDUIT*, *Lit*, *The Nation*, *Sentence*, and **Great American Prose Poems: From Poe to the Present** (Scribner 2003). He's an assistant professor of English at Illinois State University.

TRACKS Howard Camner

As I squat to pan
at Mineral Creek
I notice tracks
leading into the woods behind me

But they are not human,
so I know I am safe

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First Thoughts

Michael Rothenberg

Morning rain storm
Who are these people twisting tongues in the kitchen?
Why are they laughing in my sleep?

Coffee pot empty
Boil water they'll go away

Flood of night toys
Musical gutters

Worship graven images. TV's on the fritz
In the desert an idolatrous wild tribe

*

think more, some more, think...

High wind warning, thunder lightning
Hail aquaplaning commuters
Mudslides, limbs down
Highway crew, yellow parkas, orange trucks
Deluge at noon

Here pieces slipping
If I could remember I'd see a whole life
But I can't & I don't

*

Blah, blah, blah, jingle, jingle in my head
Memorial service, Ft. Mason, 10am
Rain blowing

Prime Minister Tony Blair requests a seat beside Barbara Streisand At Clinton White House Dinner Bash. Barbara Walters: "It Was Fabulous!"

*

Over coffee:

"If you had job 9 to 5 you'd know what it's like to try and keep a relationship working!"
Walk in my shoes a couple months, baby, then tell me what kind of job
I've got, exactly . . .

*

Back in town, can we get together? How's tomorrow?
"Free," he says, one foot in his pants, the other leg dancing blindly
When?
"Lunch"
(I drop gratefully to my knees)

Then:
"I wish I could help but I want to stay friends"
Could you explain that?

Then:
"I don't want to get divorced until we get along better"
Could you explain that?

(It's getting harder)

Then:
Double-booked, cancelled a song...

Then:
"Hey," I shout through the naked bathroom door, "can't ride you to work. Sorry!"
(run out the door)

Then:
First clear day in exactly 7 days

Then:
Crawl claustrophobic through plastic playland tunnel slung from the rafters
soaked in joyous screams of my son & the garlic waft of pizza

Then:
When you frame it you never know how it'll look

*

Eat tuna on a toasted bagel. Chew a stick of Big Red gum
Take "Democracy In America" off the shelf

Cosmos marches down the hall with a trumpet. Obscene blasting

Feet cold, feel like crying. Read experimental poetry book
What kind of language is this?

Can't sleep. Call a friend. Need someone to talk to
"Sorry," she replies, "Too tired to talk"
Hang up needy. Go to sleep fearful. Fearful

Then:

*

Sexy makeovers on "Sally" and coffee
Ocean wavering under salmon mustard grape light of Fall...

Long after midnight the silent whirl of clock
Position telephone on electric blanket, call & call

Relapse into despair

You don't work regular hours, she says, again

I don't understand (we already talked about that)

Haven't you heard enough?

Make life over with a new doo & new wardrobe
What do we know?

Down the hall the dog scratches, stretches
Maybe I'm hard on myself

Today maybe wake up and lose weight, get rich, wake up history
Maybe if you ask. I'm up to the task. Maybe you don't

*

Here comes St. Valentine's...

Arrows & hearts, hearts & arrows
(Go away)

Cherub slayer muckraker dreamer raising expectation
Come back in a couple years with your enormous puffy pink innocence
& barbed weaponry & romantic resurrection

Come back
Broadcast this tense strung obituary with unfailing strike

(Go away)
Point dipped in the dark night of the soul & a rancid shrug

"Sally,"
When bloody rouge spikes gracefully thinning affliction
Come back. I know what I'll do

Now that I'm strapped for the long haul & all

1/6/98- 2/14/98

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Born in Miami Beach, Florida in 1951, Michael Rothenberg is a poet and songwriter. He has been an active environmentalist in the San Francisco Bay Area for the past 25 years, where he cultivates orchids and bromeliads at his nursery, Shelldance. His songs have appeared in the films *Shadowhunter*, *Black Day Blue Night* and *Outside Ozona*. He is also editor and co-founder of Big Bridge Press and *Big Bridge*, an online magazine. Rothenberg's books of poems include **Favorite Songs, Nightmare of the Violins** (*Twowindows Press*), **Man/Women** w/ Joanne Kyger, **The Paris Journals** (Fish Drum), **Grown Up Cuba** (Il Begatto Press, Amsterdam), and **Unhurried Visions** (La Alameda/University of New Mexico Press). He is also author of the novel **Punk Rockwell** (Tropical Press). Editorial projects include *Overtime*, *Selected Poems* by Philip Whalen (Penguin Putnam, Inc., 2002), and **As Ever, Selected Poems** by Joanne Kyger (Penguin Books, and David's Copy, **Selected Poems of David Meltzer** (Penguin, 2004). Rothenberg divides his time between Pacifica, California and Miami, Florida.

